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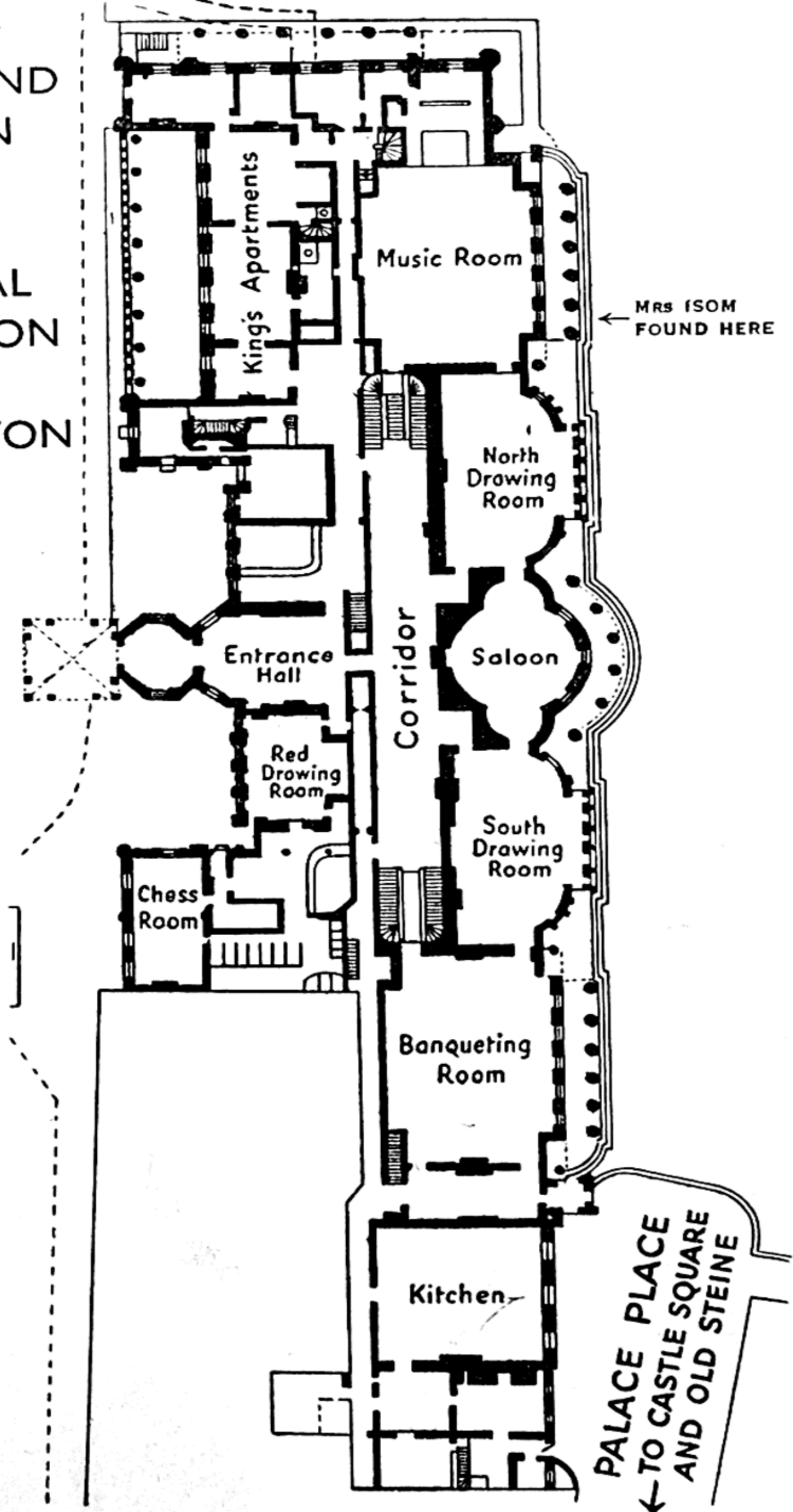
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THE GUILT IS PLAIN

GROUND
PLAN
of
THE
ROYAL
PAVILION
at
BRIGHTON



THE GUILT IS PLAIN

MR PINKERTON'S ADVENTURE
AT BRIGHTON

BY
DAVID FROME

AUTHOR OF
"THE HAMMERSMITH MURDERS," "THE BY-PASS MURDER"
"THAT'S YOUR MAN, INSPECTOR," ETC

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CHAPTER I

THE wind swept the rain in heavy gusts across the broad paved expanse between the Old Steine and the Sea Front at the Palace Pier. The white-and-gilt gingerbread minarets of the pier gleamed, wet and shadowy, stretching out into the dismal turbulent sea, beyond the Palace of Fun and on to the stoutly cheerful sign at the end. "Brighton Welcomes You," it said, barely legible from where the grey little man was standing, shivering in the icy downpour, at the top of the broad steps of the Aquarium.

The little man, a Mr. Evan Pinkerton, looked about him and blinked very disconsolately. It was his first visit to Brighton for fifteen years, and it was distinctly disappointing, especially in a southern seaside town that openly boasts of some seventeen hundred hours of bright sunshine in the year. He pulled the hard, dripping brim of his sodden brown bowler further down over his lozenge-shaped steel-rimmed spectacles, and screwed his scrawny neck deeper into the coldly uncomfortable folds of his upturned raincoat collar.

The clock on the tower over the Palace Pier entrance said 10.22. The front was deserted, except for a little group of chairmen and car-park attendants huddled together, and a few bedraggled London shop assistants on holiday. A wet goat harnessed to a small red-and-yellow cart stood at the kerb, behind a single horse-drawn vehicle whose driver peered, bulbous-nosed and morose, from the moth-eaten depths of his carriage through a curtain of pelting rain.

Mr. Pinkerton looked miserably about. At the bottom of the wide white stone stairway on which he was standing, just across the road from the sea, a young man

was pacing back and forth, his hands thrust deep into his raincoat pockets, his grey soft hat cascading a rivulet down in front of his face. From time to time he consulted his watch, looked dejectedly up the stairs toward Mr. Pinkerton, and began pacing again. Once or twice he stopped in front of the gaudy sign proclaiming that no visitor to Brighton should miss the opportunity of seeing the Fearsome Octopus (Beak like a Parrot) on display within, and gave it a kick with the toe of his wet boot. He was beginning to look to Mr. Pinkerton like a man just on the point of deciding not to wait any longer.

It was a failing of Mr. Pinkerton's that, being active-minded and inquisitive by nature, and having no business of his own to attend to, he was constantly speculating about other people's. He was, therefore, easily embarked on the theory that the young man, who had an oddly indefinable air about him, was waiting for an accomplice of some sort. Mr. Pinkerton had not got on to the sort yet when a cream-coloured bus stopped, and a girl with grey eyes and curly red-gold hair tucked under a small green silk hat jumped off it, looked back with a quick smile, paused a moment and ran past Mr. Pinkerton down the Aquarium steps.

Mr. Pinkerton's heart warmed instantly. The man behind him said to someone else, "Might as well be 'ome as muckin' abaht 'ere in all this wet," but Mr. Pinkerton, who a moment ago would have agreed heartily, found the light in the young man's face, as he bounded up the steps five at a time to meet the girl, and her radiant upturned face as they met, a decisive refutation of such talk.

"I thought you were never coming!" the young man said.

Mr. Pinkerton knew at once why he had looked odd. He was not English. He was plainly American. Although that did not account for the half-choked relief in his voice, or the next words, spoken so low that

Mr. Pinkerton could hardly hear them: "Lord, I love you!"

The girl ignored that, except for the answer in her grey shining eyes. "I thought I wasn't, either," she said breathlessly. "And I can't ever again . . ."

It was all Mr. Pinkerton could hear, strain as he might. The two of them went on out of earshot and down into the Aquarium, completely unconscious of him or anything but themselves.

The warmth went abruptly out of Mr. Pinkerton's heart. He had not missed the sudden forlorn hopelessness in the girl's voice, or the protest in the young man's hand tightening protectively on her arm.

"Oh, dear!" he thought. He was definitely distressed. There might be, of course, and probably was, a very good reason why she shouldn't ever see him again. There might be dozens of reasons. She was very young, and her family probably knew more about this young man than she did. Mr. Pinkerton knew that you could not always tell by the looks of people, especially Americans. He might already have a girl, back in Kalamazoo, Iowa. Just because he had a rugged and open clean-cut face, a square jaw, white teeth and a pleasant smile was no reason that the child should meet him. So it was probably, Mr. Pinkerton decided, all for the best.

Not that he believed any of this in the least, in his own heart. He had been to the cinema too often not to recognize true love when he saw it, even on the steps of the Brighton Aquarium where he had never seen it before; and he knew the pathetic fallacy of people's interfering in young people's lives. He stood there for a moment, undecided. Of course, he oughtn't to follow them. He ought to pretend he had not heard the note of hopeless longing in two lovers' voices, or seen the light in their eyes. It wasn't really any of his business. However, that point of view had never meant much to him for some years, not really having had any

business; and furthermore, he ought to see the Octopus. The sign said so. So far as he knew, thinking it over, he had never seen an Octopus, especially one with a beak like a parrot. He glanced round, having, as he often had, the vague notion that someone—he never had any clear idea of who it might be—was watching him, seeing through his flimsy transparent little subterfuges, spotting him unerringly for the inveterate busybody that he was.

It was a kind of subconscious act, rather than an actual looking for someone. Mr. Pinkerton remembered later, at the end of the dreadful series of events, grim and terrible, that turned his Brighton holiday into a positive shambles—and in which he came as near to being shambled as anybody—looking about like that, as he had stood there on the Sea Front at the top of the Aquarium steps. But, of course, when it was all over it was easy to reflect that he might possibly have avoided a great deal of trouble, if he had really looked then. He might easily have seen the woman with the light-coloured raincoat and blue straw hat crowned with multi-coloured velvet pansies—seen her, possibly, as she got off the same cream-coloured bus coming from King's Cliff; seen her, moreover, before she saw him. She had not got off at the same time as the girl with the grey eyes and reddish hair, but some distance farther along, as the girl was disappearing down the steps. And she had then come hurrying back, just as Mr. Pinkerton was feeling in his pocket, weighing his curiosity about the girl and the man, and the Octopus, against the necessary expenditure of sixpence.

For most people left with £75,000 by the merest accident of their late wife's being too stingy to invest in a sixpenny will form to leave it to somebody else, there would probably have been no such problem. But Mr. Pinkerton, having never for many years had sixpence to call his own, unless he had accumulated it farthing by farthing, mostly by walking a mile out of

his way to a shop where he could save three farthings a pound on his wife's lodgers' breakfast kippers, regarded each squandered sixpence as a direct challenge to Mrs. Pinkerton's permanent immortality. He never spent twopence, much less sixpence, without the unpleasant sensation of goose-flesh down his spine that had been a sure sign of her bodily presence when she was on earth, and he was potboy, scullery-maid and boots in her lodging-house in Golders Green.

Not even Mrs. Pinkerton, however, mortally immortal, could alter Fate, as Fate stood that August morning on the Sea Front at Brighton. Mr. Pinkerton paid his sixpence and went in to see the Fearsome Octopus, not even turning at the barrier to look back before he entered the dank subterranean corridor, with its arched white-tiled ceiling discoloured with seeping water and its sides of murky illuminated tanks, where innumerable whiting and herring swimming in clouded depths reminded him poignantly of infinite numbers of breakfast trays.

At first he could not see the man and the girl. When he did see them they were at the farther end of the long, narrow corridor, seated on a bench under the centre arch, heads close together, completely absorbed. Mr. Pinkerton's heart gave a sharp sympathetic throb. He moved over to the tank marked "Octopus," and pressed his nose to the glass. The Octopus, however, was not to be seen. If he was there somewhere, in the murky depths of discoloured water, Mr. Pinkerton had no way of knowing it. He was peering into the recesses of brown mouldy rocks when suddenly, quite out of a clear sky, there was a voice at his elbow. The voice was quietly grim.

"If you don't leave this place at once," it said, "I'm going to call the police."

Mr. Pinkerton blinked his watery grey eyes, adjusted his spectacles nervously, and glanced first to one side and then to the other.

So far as he could make out there was no one else in the arched hall—no one besides the young man and the girl and himself; except, of course, for the woman who had suddenly appeared and was standing there, next to him, in front of the Octopus tank. Mr. Pinkerton moistened his dry lips and peered apprehensively at her.

“And don’t pretend you don’t *know* you’re being odiously offensive,” the woman snapped.

Even in the dim curious light reflected from the tank Mr. Pinkerton could see her eyes narrow and her lips tighten.

“Oh dear!” he thought wretchedly. “It is me she’s talking to.”

All his life there had been somebody pointing out to him that he was an offensive person. His maiden Welsh aunts who had brought him up, the ghastly little scoundrels he had taught as an underpaid, underfed undermaster at an inferior Welsh school, his wife—above all, his wife. But for a perfectly strange woman in front of an Octopus tank in Brighton to have hit on it so unerringly was definitely unnerving.

He edged back a step and measured the distance beyond her to the door where the attendant sat. Her black cotton-gloved hand tightened on her umbrella.

“Don’t think I haven’t had my eye on you.”

Her voice was edged with quiet menace.

“You can go back to your employers and tell them that I for one am perfectly aware of what’s going on. What’s more, I’ll tell *you*—for your personal information—that if I so much as lay eyes on you again, I’ll tell that young man what I know. And let him handle it in his own way.”

Mr. Pinkerton swallowed, blinked and stared. The girl and the young man had got up and were standing close together, silhouetted against the conger eel tank down the hall.

He turned back to the woman, peering nervously up at her through the fishy gloom. It was quite dark; but

her lean sallow bitter face looked so appallingly like the late Mrs. Pinkerton's that for one desperate instant the little man had the monstrous idea that it *was* Mrs. Pinkerton. It was impossible, of course. Nevertheless, his heart turned icy-cold, and a clammy sweat broke out on his forehead. He edged back another step.

"There . . . I . . . there must be some mistake," he stammered.

"That's what I'm pointing out to you, my good man. You'll realize it if he ever lays hands on your scrawny hide. Following people about!" she added angrily.

Mr. Pinkerton, contracting himself against the Octopus tank, keeping one eye on her while with the other he measured the distance to the door again, blinked in bewildered alarm. Of course, in a sense he had been following the young man and the girl; but how this woman knew it was completely beyond him.

"He'll break every bone in your body!" she said, with grim relish.

It was a remark that Mr. Pinkerton was to remember to his dying day, though naturally he had no idea of that at the moment. He glanced apprehensively back at the young man. He didn't for an instant put it beyond him. It was obvious that he was head over ears in love with the girl . . . just from the way he was bending over her with her arm tucked tightly in his. And about Americans in love Mr. Pinkerton knew a good deal. In fact, he knew a good deal about Americans in practically everything. It was not for nothing that he had been going to the cinema once a week during Mrs. Pinkerton's life, if he could find the money, and four times a week regularly since her blessed departure. He knew that in America young men stop at little, if anything. It would hardly have surprised him in the least if at that very moment the young man had suddenly materialized a ten-piece orchestra, with the conger eel as leader, and then began dancing in the most intricate and incredible fashion, or even suddenly

ripped out a machine-gun and started mowing down the Aquarium. He would certainly never expect him to hesitate an instant in a small matter like breaking any or all of Mr. Pinkerton's brittle bones.

He edged another step away from the woman. A comforting distance of some feet separated them, or did until she took an abrupt step toward him. Her voice sank to an ominous whisper.

"And you may tell your employers that I'm going to warn Mrs. Isom . . . unless you're withdrawn at once!"

The cold sweat broke out anew on Mr. Pinkerton's forehead as the sudden thought came to him that the woman was mad: stark, raving mad. He moistened his cracking lips and edged closer to the Octopus, trying frantically to recall what it is one does when confronted by a homicidal maniac. He stared up at her, terrified. She was looking steadily at him with gleaming eyes, one wisp of greyish hair straggling down by her ear, her lips set in bitter contempt and fury. For an instant again she looked so dreadfully like the late Mrs. Pinkerton—of whom, dead or alive, he was more frightened than of a whole battalion of homicidal maniacs—that he turned, dashed for the door as fast as his shaking legs would carry him, and darted through the barrier without so much as a sideways glance at the astonished attendant.

CHAPTER II

HALF-WAY up the wide white steps Mr. Pinkerton slowed down a bit, and looked back cautiously. There was no one in sight. He hurried on up to the street level and stood a moment, not quite knowing what to do. The idea occurred to him that he had paid sixpence to get in there, and that it was sixpence entirely wasted—but it occurred more from a long habit of parsimony than as a matter of real regret. He glanced back again at the entrance. The young man and the girl were coming out. For an instant he thought they might be coming after him, but they stopped and began to put pennies into a fortune-telling machine in the entrance hall. Mr. Pinkerton stared down at them avidly.

The girl was really very pretty . . . pretty enough to be in the pictures, he thought. She had wide-set, dancing grey eyes above delicately modelled, rather high cheekbones, a small nose and a pointed impish chin. Her cheeks were flushed now, and she was laughing as if all the nonsense about not meeting again had been settled quite as it should be. Her lithe slender body even under her raincoat was alive and eager. The tip of her chin just came to the young man's broad shoulders, so that Mr. Pinkerton realized she was quite tall. The young man was grinning down at her cheerfully. He was not exactly handsome, probably, but he looked pleasant enough, and Mr. Pinkerton liked the serious sort of way in which he would look at the laughing girl every once in a while. He certainly did not look as if he would break every bone in one's body.

Suddenly, standing there, it was all clear to Mr.

Pinkerton. The woman by the Octopus tank did not even know the young man. She had probably never seen him before in her life. She had simply pretended to, in order to alarm him. The nonsense about his employers was pretence too. Mr. Pinkerton blinked his watery grey eyes as a monstrous idea came to him.

"It couldn't be that she . . . that she imagined I was . . . molesting her!" he thought. He hesitated to put such a bizarre and incredible notion into words even in the timid depths of his mind.

He stood there, utterly stunned, for a moment; but only for a moment. Behind him, on the stone stairway, he heard rhythmic footsteps, and the young man's voice. "Well, if he follows you again, just let me know," he was saying, with a ghastly sort of cheerfulness. "I'll knock his block off."

"Oh dear!" Mr. Pinkerton thought.

He did not so much as glance round. He pulled his brown bowler over his eyes and scuttled across the road like a frightened rabbit, not even attempting to thread the elaborate yellow-lined maze marked out by some intricate Hore-Belisha for hordes of city mice. A cream-coloured bus splattered past, swerved drunkenly to avoid him and narrowly missed a crowd of half-drowned little boys with master, paddling grimly by toward the beach. Mr. Pinkerton cleared the opposite corner and scurried along the Old Steine.

At the door of the dingy boarding-house where he had stopped fifteen years before he paused and glanced furtively back toward the Sea Front. Several women were coming along; all of them wore raincoats and dark hats. Mr. Pinkerton cleared the stone steps in a leap and fled up the two flights of narrow uncarpeted stairs to Mrs. Mortlake's second floor front.

He peered out between the starched folds of the cheap Nottingham lace curtains and into the street below. One by one each of the women passed by, without so much as a glance at Mrs. Mortlake's door.

Mr. Pinkerton breathed a sigh of relief, and stood there a moment, gazing across the wide Parade at the astonishing outline of the Brighton Pavilion, faintly visible through the trees. Then he turned away and sat down in the chintz-covered arm-chair with the broken springs and loose back that Mrs. Mortlake charged up to successive unsuspecting guests, stared unhappily at the large discoloured crack across the bouquet of red roses on the toilet jug, and thought still more unhappily about the fix he was in.

Incredible as it seemed, that was really what the woman there by the Octopus tank had thought. Would she report him—had she perhaps already reported him—to the police? Heaven only knew what she would tell them, Mr. Pinkerton thought wretchedly, and of course they would never believe he had not been following her. They always took a woman's word against a man's, in cases of the sort, especially a respectable woman's, and anyone looking at her face and her cotton gloves would instantly see that she was highly respectable. And he would never be able to make the police see that he was infinitely more terrified of meeting a solitary woman in a desolate place than she could ever be of meeting him. It was fantastic on the face of it.

He blinked miserably at the crack in the jug, aware all the time that the thing that was bothering him, upsetting him dreadfully, really, was not the Brighton police at all. The most they could do would be to put him in irons and clap him into Lewes gaol. So far as that went, they could even hang him, if they wanted to, if that would be all there was to it. He would hardly have minded it at all. No, the bad thing was, how could he ever explain it to his friend and former lodger in his wife's house in Golders Green, Inspector J. Humphrey Bull of the C.I.D. of New Scotland Yard . . . to say nothing of Sir Charles Debenham, the Assistant Commissioner himself?

It was, for instance, just the sort of thing that some men *went* to Brighton for.

Mr. Pinkerton, flushing deeply, pulled his suitcase out from under his narrow iron bed. Then his heart sank as he heard a heavy step on the stairs landing. It was Mrs. Mortlake.

He pushed the bag back under the bed, felt for the knot of his purple string necktie and ran his forefinger round the edge of his narrow celluloid collar. He had not been potboy and boots in Mrs. Pinkerton's lodging-house for many dismal years for nothing. He remembered clearly what the late happily departed Mrs. Pinkerton used to say about lodgers who booked her rooms and left before their time was up. Even if they had paid up, she gave them a lacing just the same.

Mrs. Mortlake's heavy foot was on the top landing, her horny knuckles against the flimsy door panel.

"Come in," Mr. Pinkerton said weakly.

Mrs. Mortlake's head appeared. It looked like the head of an aged pug dog that had got its face in a tub of pink flour. Her solidly dyed black hair was anchored with large ornamental pins, and under it two brightly suspicious eyes darted from one end of the shabby room to the other.

"Thought I'd pop my head in and see if you was quite comfortable, sir," she said breathlessly. Her smirk was unconvincing.

"Oh . . . yes," Mr. Pinkerton said hastily. "Only, I find I have to——"

"I'm so glad," Mrs. Mortlake said firmly. "Because I turned down two old friends so you could have this room."

Her smile did not deceive Mr. Pinkerton for an instant. Mrs. Pinkerton had always known too, in some way, when a lodger was preparing to walk out. It was that sixth sense that landladies have in place of the usual ones.

"The only reason I can let you have it as cheap as I

do is I've not had running hot and cold laid on up here yet. Otherwise it's by far my best."

Mr. Pinkerton glanced apologetically round the drab room.

"It's been a bad year all around. Everybody's empty. The people that do come act like they think they're at the Metropole."

Mrs. Mortlake's head moved back. She started to close the door. Her head returned suddenly.

"Oh. By the way."

Her bright eyes glanced in furtive inspection of Mr. Pinkerton's alarmed face for an instant.

"There was a man rang up on the phone, asking if you was stopping here. He . . . I did think he said he was a policeman. Now I do trust you've not got in any trouble, Mr. Pinkerton."

Mrs. Mortlake's air was at once hopeful and admonitory.

"Because of course I've always kept a respectable house, and I've got my own reputation to think of."

Mr. Pinkerton felt himself, as his late wife used to put it, go that queer all over.

"Did he . . . did he say what he wanted?"

"No," said Mrs. Mortlake. "He said something. I couldn't quite make it out. I expect you'll hear from him again. Well . . ."

She nodded cheerfully.

"Lunch is at one. I like all my guests to feel at home, Mr. Pinkerton. A home away from home, I like to say. Well, I do hope you're not in serious trouble. And I certainly hope it isn't drink that got you in it if it is."

She waited. Mr. Pinkerton could only shake his head dumbly.

"Well," said Mrs. Mortlake. She closed the door. Mr. Pinkerton could hear her heavy steps going down the stairs.

He sat perfectly still for a moment. Then he took out his purple silk handkerchief and wiped his forehead.

Incredible as it seemed, the Octopus woman *had* gone to the police. But how, he thought desperately, could she have done it, in that short time . . . ? Even then it could not have been more than fifteen minutes since he went into the Aquarium. Then he nodded his head mechanically. There was a police box, of course, or rather a sort of sub-station, just at the very head of the Aquarium stairs. He could almost have touched it when he was standing there.

Mr. Pinkerton breathed deeply, and looked longingly at the corner of his suitcase protruding from under the bed. He did not quite know what to do. In the cinema, people in his position usually took it on the lam. He would gladly have done so too, except that he had no clear notion, really, of what the lam was.

It was after half-past ten o'clock on the next morning, Tuesday, Half-Quarter Day, 11th August, when the idea unfortunately occurred to him that Mrs. Mortlake was probably an old dodderer and that he himself was certainly one. It was true that the Octopus woman looked exactly the kind of person who would go at once to the police, in spite of the fact that he *had* gone away when she had told him to go. It was also true that there was a police box at the top of the Aquarium stairs. But it was perfectly impossible, unless the Brighton Constabulary maintained a system of surveillance that made the OGPU look like children, that anyone could know where he lived. Not by just looking at him, Mr. Pinkerton realized, drawing a deep and heartfelt breath of relief . . . and still less by merely hearing what the Octopus woman thought of him. No, it had been supremely silly ever to have thought for a moment that the Brighton or any other police could have got on to him that quickly, even if, by some inconceivable chance, the odd angular woman in the Aquarium had really thought he was trying to molest her. And Mrs. Mortlake had merely imagined it had been a policeman calling. Policemen,

Mr. Pinkerton reflected, in any case don't give one a ring; they come.

He put on his raincoat and his brown bowler and went out into the Old Steine. Neither the police nor any of the people in the Aquarium was in sight.

It seemed very clear to Mr. Pinkerton later, when he found himself waking up in the great dreary house in Golders Green in the night, bathed in cold perspiration, trembling with the fear and agony that lived on in his subconscious mind, that there ought to have been some forewarning of the business that was directly ahead of him. He had glanced up and down the street, not entirely without anxiety; but then he had crossed over to the other side quite confidently, never dreaming, certainly, that blind chance walked beside him, leading him with the inexorable firmness of Fate itself into a troubled maze of conflicting passion and desire, deeper and deeper into the shadow of death.

CHAPTER III

MR. PINKERTON had forgotten what a fantastic creation Brighton's Royal Pavilion is. He stood under the gnarled wind-stunted elms and stared at it in complete astonishment . . . an Oriental palace, an oblong of decorated arches and bellying minarets, set back in a velvet emerald lawn. Having very little eye for proper architecture, he remembered vaguely that this odd-looking *mélange* lying there was popularly supposed to be an awful-looking thing, the epitome of all the very worst taste of the Regency. Personally, he thought it was rather nice. Its odd green-blue colour made it look to him much like the fantastic fairy palace carved out of an enormous Rocquefort cheese he had once seen on exhibition at the Crystal Palace. He had liked the cheese palace immensely, and this one, with its big centre dome and all its lesser domes, looked very strange and romantic indeed—much more like something you would expect to see in the films than in an English seaside town.

He was still gazing in pleased wonder at it when a harsh rasping voice behind him focused his attention as sharply as if someone had struck him in the face. It was not that he recognized the voice; it was merely the savagely animated quality of it.

"And what," it said grimly, "are you bringing me here for, again, to-day?"

Mr. Pinkerton looked back over his shoulder.

A large dove-grey Rolls had stopped at the kerb. The grey-uniformed chauffeur and a nursing sister in a long grey cloak were practically lifting out an obese unpleasant-looking old woman in purple silk, with a high purple straw hat covered with lavender ostrich

plumes. They deposited her in a bath-chair, held ready by an attendant.

"There you are," said the nurse professionally. She folded the old woman's skirts about her grotesquely thick ankles, and gave her a black hogskin envelope that she was trying to clutch with fat heavily ringed fingers.

"Where's my stick?" the old woman snapped.

"Here it is, madam." The chauffeur held out a gold-handled ebony stick, placing it carefully in her hands. As they closed feebly on it Mr. Pinkerton could see that she was really dreadfully crippled.

She glared from the chauffeur to the sister. "I asked why I'm being brought to this absurd place again to-day!"

There was nothing crippled about her voice. Mr. Pinkerton quailed a little at its harsh power.

The nurse smiled.

"It's dreadful, isn't it," she said calmly. "Dr. Johnson said it looked to him as if St. Paul's had come to Brighton and pupped."

Mr. Pinkerton flushed slightly. He belonged to the fast-disappearing school that expects decorous speech in young women. The nurse was attractive, too, with bright blonde hair and brown eyes. Her mouth was a bit on the hard side, Mr. Pinkerton noticed, without surprise, considering the shameless nature of her remark.

"I'm not interested in what your doctors say about anything!" the old lady snapped. "Take me to the Front immediately! I want to go to the Front!"

"Of course you do. It's frightfully stupid, coming this way," the nurse said. "We'll go back at once. I'll take the chair. Noakes, you wait here for us."

She nodded to the attendant. "You can go," she said. Then, while Mr. Pinkerton stared, open-mouthed, she set off with the chair and the old woman in it, along the Parade, in precisely the wrong direction.

Mr. Pinkerton looked at the two men standing there

by the car. The chairman scratched his head and whistled. "She's a cool 'un," he said admiringly.

The chauffeur, a slender man of medium height, lit a cigarette.

"You've ruddy well got to be, if you want to get along with that old b——," he said coolly. His eyes met Mr. Pinkerton's for an instant, and he smiled faintly at the look on the grey little man's face.

Mr. Pinkerton frowned as he moved away. The old lady was no doubt a bit of a tartar, but that was not the way a chauffeur ought to speak of his mistress in public. The chauffeur was an objectionable fellow himself, with his white face, black side-whiskers and oddly protruding dark eyes . . . mealy-mouthed one minute, spiteful the next.

Mr. Pinkerton walked slowly along, after the nurse and the old woman, already some distance ahead of him. At the end of the Pavilion gardens, where Queen Victoria's stout, matronly figure stands eternally confronted with the smiling profile of her reprobate uncle standing outside his fantastic pleasure domes, he turned to the left and went into the grounds. A few people were seated on the benches that line the driveway: oldish people with the vacant homeless look that pensioners in resort towns so often have, beggars munching apples, nursemaids with children, wistful holiday people already weary of the rocks, wind and sea and the confusion of the Front. A terrier puppy on a green lead was barking frantically at the fat pigeons waddling unconcernedly about picking up crumbs.

Mr. Pinkerton would have liked to sit down too, in the pale sun that had struggled through the overcast sky for a moment. But the only vacant places he could see were next to solitary women, and he had no intention of risking another misunderstanding. It was perfectly possible that the police really might be looking for him, and if the Octopus woman had made a complaint, of course, they might easily misinterpret a quite

simple act. So he trudged dejectedly on, not even venturing to take off his hat to let the sun shine on his bare head, as he would have liked to do.

In front of him a man in a green pork-pie hat and a girl in a pink silk dress and big red straw hat were strolling along arm-in-arm. In front of the Pavilion entrance they stopped.

“Cor!” the man said. His face was pasty and not very pleasant, Mr. Pinkerton thought, with a wide mouth that looked as if it could easily be very menacing; and his head under the pork-pie hat was queerly egg-shaped. “Mykes you think of a blinkin’ fairy tyle!”

The girl nodded, chewing gum reflectively.

“Wot d’yer syc we ’ave a squint, Polly?”

The girl gave him an admiring glance. Mr. Pinkerton listened.

“You always was a queer ’un, Steve! I expect it’s all right. I mean, it’s a palace, ain’t it?”

Mr. Pinkerton did not hear what Steve replied, but he knew exactly what Polly meant. He had felt that way about lots of places, even Windsor Palace on Bank Holiday. He watched the two of them disappear under the Oriental portico marked with the three feathers of a century-dead Prince of Wales. Then he felt in his waistcoat-pocket for sixpence, glanced timidly about as he invariably did before committing an inexcusable extravagance, and followed them inside. It was then exactly eight minutes past eleven.

For a moment he stood staring about him in a bewildered trance. By the simple act of paying the attendant in the entrance hall, he had transported himself out of the world of Mrs. Mortlake’s broken jugs into a world of lovely Chinese ladies, golden dragons and winding serpents, amid lotus flowers and bamboo pillars. Open-eyed and open-mouthed, he wandered from the Red Drawing-room along the blue-and-white tiled passage to the Royal Kitchen, and stood there, peering through the door at the great fireplace with its

roasting spit and wheels and ornate copper canopy, and at the long tables where royal banquets had been prepared in the days when people really ate and drank.

He had just opened the small guide book that he had got from the attendant when a man in grey flannel bags and an old scantily cut white-linen coat came in hastily through the door at right angles to that in which Mr. Pinkerton was standing, stopped abruptly, lifted an eyeglass dangling from the buttonhole of his yellow waistcoat, and stood staring at him as if he was an unexpected and extraordinary apparition. The man was tall and thin, with hollow cheeks and ill cavernous eyes.

Mr. Pinkerton moistened his lips and looked anxiously at the man, who continued to stare at him.

"This is a . . . a public room, isn't it?" Mr. Pinkerton inquired nervously.

The tall thin man started. "What's that?" he said quickly.

"I mean, this room is open to the public, isn't it?"

"The public," the man repeated uncertainly. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Pinkerton started.

"Oh yes!" the man said. "Oh yes, indeed! Trouble is, too many public! Entirely too many. Extraordinary coincidence. Public all over the place—ha, ha, ha!"

He stopped short, looked sharply at Mr. Pinkerton, hesitated an instant, and said, "Ha, ha, ha! My name's Harris, if they ask you—ha, ha, ha! Extraordinary!"

With that he strode across the great kitchen to a quite ordinary brown door opposite, opened it and went out. Mr. Pinkerton had a sudden glimpse of a narrow street and a red telephone kiosk before the door closed and left him staring blankly at its drab brown surface.

He blinked his watery grey eyes, adjusted his lozenge-

shaped spectacles, glanced cautiously about, and took a deep breath. It seemed scarcely believable that every one in Brighton was mad.

A sound from his right made him glance back again. A man in a dark lounge suit with a black despatch-case in one hand and a silver-mounted stick in the other, with a heavily fleshy face on which a strawberry birth-mark showed prominently over one temple under his thin grey hair, came sauntering out of the door at the end of the huge room. He examined the chains of the enormous spit, nodded as if the equipment generally met with his approval, looked up at the copper palm leaves, dark and graceful under the airy skylight, nodded again, looked at his watch, clucked impatiently, muttered something under his breath, and hurried back the way he had come.

Mr. Pinkerton stared after him too. For a moment he had the strange idea that he had got into some extraordinary modern version of *Alice in Wonderland*, and this was the White Rabbit. As a matter of fact, now he came to think about it, Mr. Harris had looked very much like the Mad Hatter. It was all extremely confusing.

He looked at his own watch. It was exactly twenty minutes past eleven. He opened the guide book again to the piece about the kitchen, and noted that it was forty-two feet from east to west, that with the exception of the electric ovens on the south the room was the same as it was a hundred years ago, and that the eighty copper leaves on the bamboo pillars, fixed on 3rd April 1820, cost eighty pounds.

Suddenly he stopped reading about the magnificent copper canopies and blinked his eyes. From the door through which the White Rabbit had gone came a woman's voice. He recognized it instantly; it was the old tartar's nurse. She was speaking quickly, quietly and with great assurance.

"They'll show up. One glimpse of them is all we

need. She's weakening rapidly. She's seen her once. That will be all of that."

"I trust you're right, Rita," a man's voice said. It had a definitely sceptical quality, Mr. Pinkerton thought, and also a curiously hard and fishy quality.

"I know I'm right. I heard her tell Arnold to tell him she'd be here a little after eleven. This'll be the second time. Oh, it's all simple. We'll give her ten minutes more. No . . . don't! Please don't! Not here—it's too dangerous."

Mr. Pinkerton moved his feet on the paved floor and cleared his throat. He heard steps retreating along the corridor, and a door open and close. He stood there for a few minutes, reading his guide book, and then leisurely made his way out of the kitchen, through what the book described as the table-deckers' room, toward the great Banqueting Hall with its incredible chandelier that weighs an entire ton.

He put his hand on the door, and drew back. Someone was coming through from the other side. A girl's voice was saying breathlessly, "Oh, please, Andy! I've got to go, she must have seen me! You . . . you don't understand! Please—let me go!"

Mr. Pinkerton heard the unmistakable transatlantic accent of the young man of the Aquarium.

"Listen, Linda—I'll let you go as soon as you pull yourself together, and stop shaking, and look at me, and tell me what the hell's the matter."

"Oh no, Andy—really, I've *got* to get out of here! Oh, you don't understand!"

The girl's terrified voice was scarcely above a whisper.

"Oh lord!" the young man groaned impatiently. "Quit saying that. How *can* I understand when you go into a jitter just because the old girl sees you?"

"Oh, it's not that! It's . . . she *must* know—that I'm seeing you . . . or she wouldn't be here!"

"Well, what of it?" the young man asked curtly.

“What if she does? Look here, Linda. I’m going back there now. I’m going to tell her——”

“Oh *no*, Andy, you *can’t*! Then I’d *never* see you again, and . . . I couldn’t bear that! *Really*, Andy! Oh I knew I oughtn’t to come to-day, I knew something would happen!”

Then Mr. Pinkerton heard the young man groan again as the girl’s voice broke into a sob, and the door flew open suddenly. Mr. Pinkerton shrank back, flattened, open-mouthed and staring, against the wall. He saw the girl run, red gold-tipped like an arrow, down the narrow room toward the tiled hall. The young man took three long strides after her, and stopped. He stood there for a moment, staring at the door, shrugged unhappily and went back, not so much as glancing at the little grey man against the wall, speechless with sympathy.

CHAPTER IV

It took Mr. Pinkerton several moments, even after he had closed the door, to muster up enough courage to open it again and continue his sight-seeing. It was all most odd indeed. What was worse, it was passing definitely from the merely strange to the nerve-racking; for scenes like the last were a strain on Mr. Pinkerton. If there was one thing—apart from crime and its investigation, of course—that he really could not help putting himself into with all his heart and soul, it was the perplexed affairs of just such young people in just such a situation—whatever, Mr. Pinkerton thought, the situation might be.

He went on, wondering what connection there could be between all these people—and there was obviously a connection of some kind. He had not gone far before his astonishment and his bewilderment had increased very considerably.

In the great Banqueting Room he had barely time to glance at the immense dragon hanging from lotus leaves against a tropical sky decked with strands of rubies and pearls, holding in his claws great lotus bowls of multi-coloured light, when he saw the man in the green pork-pie hat and the girl in pink. They were coming toward him through the door opposite the one he had just come through, and they were coming rapidly. If their manner had not had a definite quality of panic in it, Mr. Pinkerton might have thought that he and they were playing some game of hide-and-seek. But they were both quite pale. He could see that even across the great room.

They stopped short for an instant when they saw him, and the man suddenly took the girl's arm in his,

muttering something to her quickly and inaudibly. They swaggered, quite as if nothing had changed or happened at all, through the room, not toward Mr. Pinkerton, but to another door at their end of the room, opposite the one they had come through.

The little grey man looked at them silently, blinking in great perplexity. The careless swagger disappeared gradually as they neared the door, and by the time they had got to it they were going very nearly at a run. They were quite running when they went out.

Mr. Pinkerton hesitated a moment, and crossed the room. At that moment the attendant to whom he had given his sixpence at the entrance came in from the Royal Kitchen with a group of women.

"The chandelier in this room, ladies, weighs one ton. It has always hung here except for the time it was down. They say Her Majesty Queen Adelaide dreamed one night that it fell while they were having a State banquet, and upon communicating her fears to His Majesty King William the Fourth . . ."

Mr. Pinkerton heard no more. He made for the door through which Steve and Polly had gone and slipped through before the attendant could warn him that that was not the way he was expected to go. He did not, however, get very far. Inside half a minute he had popped back into the Banqueting Room with an extraordinary agility, and stood there breathing heavily.

The door led, as he had imagined it would, to the long corridor, or Gallery, as the guide book called it. At either end of the Gallery was a flight of bamboo-railed stairs leading to the upper apartments. And on the stairs at the end that Mr. Pinkerton was facing as he stepped out of the Banqueting Room door a woman was standing, looking up. It was not very light out there, but Mr. Pinkerton recognized her before he had taken five steps. It was the Octopus woman.

She had on her raincoat and her blue straw hat, with

her umbrella clutched in her black cotton-gloved hand. In what light there was from the upper windows she was not the odd brownish green colour she had been down in the Aquarium the day before; but Mr. Pinkerton had no doubts at all about her. His heart turned to a cold leaden lump as he leaped back. He was sure, however, that she had not seen him. She was watching something going on above her.

He stood just inside the door, in the Banqueting Room, breathing very deeply.

The attendant looked at him. "If you'll just keep straight along, sir, the way the signs indicate," he said severely. "And now, ladies, if you'll notice the four corner lustres, each suspended from the claws of a mythical bird, with the head of a dragon, the breast of a goose, the tail of an eagle . . ."

Mr. Pinkerton hurried through the door that the signs indicated. It was the one through which Steve and Polly had come, and it led from room to room along the West Front of the Pavilion. He scarcely noticed what rooms he was in, except to look out once through the long windows across the terrace and the green lawn to the populous security of the crowded streets. He sat down for a moment and tried to compose himself. But it was no use. He got up and hurried on, not even noticing the lovely Saloon, with its simulated sky and painted red damask panels, the one thought in his mind to get out of the Pavilion, somehow, as quickly as he could.

If the Octopus woman *had* by any chance seen him. . . . He wiped the pin-pricks of perspiration off his grey brow, and went along, as quickly as he could without actually running, into the North Drawing-room, and thence, through another door, into the great Music Room.

There Mr. Pinkerton stopped.

People have always stopped, with varying degrees of abruptness, when they enter this room, with its high

silver fish-scale dome, its unbelievably lovely painted walls, its incredible lustres, its enormous entwined serpents writhing about cornices, seats and bamboo pillars. But that was not why Mr. Pinkerton stopped. He stopped because the Octopus woman was standing there, directly in the middle of the roped-off path, her back squarely to him.

The Octopus woman was motionless. For an instant Mr. Pinkerton was too appalled to notice how deathly still that room was . . . or perhaps his own heart, beating in his ears, drowned out the awful silence.

Then, because the woman still did not move, he peered past her, at the bath-chair in which the domineering old woman he had seen in the grey Rolls was sitting. She was facing him. . . .

Mr. Pinkerton saw what was the matter, what all the trouble and the mystery had been about, and why the Octopus woman was standing there, still quite motionless. The old woman was dead. More than that. He could see the shining red streak creeping insidiously, like one of the gorged, torpid serpents on the wall, horribly, viscid-slow, down her large silken bosom.

For a sickening instant the little Welshman's eyes were glued to the small hideous gash in her throat, and on the rigid raincoated figure standing there, unaware of anything but the horror before her. He took an involuntary step backward; his foot struck the leg of the carved seat. His heart gave a nauseating lurch. She had heard him. He could see her turning, slowly, scarcely moving, like one of those terrifying figures in the automatic Grand Guignol machines in the Palace of Fun, until she was facing him.

It was then that he saw the small blood-stained paring knife in her black-gloved hand.

He stared at it, and then at her face. Never, not even in the cinema, had he seen such awful fear in any human eyes. The drab commonplace woman in the

cheap raincoat and dowdy hat was transfigured by the sheer power of the horror that lived in her face. Mr. Pinkerton's gaze was riveted there as if it were the Medusa he was staring at and he was turned to immovable stone.

Suddenly the tension broke. The majesty of terror in her face crumpled like a piece of crushed tissue.

"Oh, *God!*" she cried softly.

Mr. Pinkerton saw her fingers open. The stained scullery knife fell, clattering hideously to the floor. The instant that the two of them stood there, staring at it, stretched into an eternity.

The attendant's voice, back behind him, came through the open door: "This, ladies, is the Grand Saloon. Mr. Noel Coward used this room in *Conversation Piece*. They tell a story that the old Duke of Norfolk swore he'd never spend a night . . ."

It came to Mr. Pinkerton as remote and unreal as a voice on the wireless. Then it came to him with a shock that he had got to do something, and quickly. Still, for a long moment, he could not overpower the leaden inertia that tied his feet there.

"Why . . . why did you do it?" he stammered.

The woman in the raincoat and blue straw hat stared at him, and what there had been of horror and tragedy in her face disappeared sharply. She opened her mouth, and closed it again, speechless. Then she found her voice.

"*Me?*" she gasped. "*Why . . . oh, you . . . whatever are you talking about? You don't think I . . . ? Why—*"

Mr. Pinkerton blinked and took a step backward. He adjusted his spectacles nervously and moistened his dry lips as unobtrusively as possible. He would have backed off still farther except that he was already in a slightly concave position over the long seat with the fat carved snakes on its arms.

"Well, you . . . it . . . I mean, it rather looked like it," he stammered hastily.

He expected that the Octopus woman would fly into a rage. He really could not have blamed her. But she didn't. There was a look of dreadful fright on her face, and round her trembling lips she turned suddenly a sick green.

"Of course it does."

Mr. Pinkerton could scarcely hear her stricken voice above the cheerful, slightly playful, professionally suave voice coming in, nearer, through the door. "Many people have complained about the architecture of the Pavilion. I wonder if you ladies would be shocked if I tell you the most notable comment. Sidney Smith said it looked as if St. Paul's had come to Brighton and . . ."

Mr. Pinkerton started suddenly.

"Why in Heaven's name do you just stand there?" the Octopus woman said harshly. She drew a long breath. Mr. Pinkerton realized, with a sinking feeling, that she was herself again. "Go and get the police! Do *something*! Don't just *stand*!"

Mr. Pinkerton stared at her for a moment, turned and fled through the door.

The group of women round the elderly attendant, just coming into the North Drawing-room from the Saloon, were still tittering delicately at the indelicacy of the Regency clergyman's famous remark. The expression on their faces changed with comic suddenness as Mr. Pinkerton bolted toward them. The attendant stared, frowning. Mr. Pinkerton collected himself with an effort. He walked up quite composedly.

"There has been a serious accident in . . . in there," he said. "I shall have to call the police."

Then, before anyone could speak, he walked quickly on, through the Saloon and the South Drawing-room, nipped through the table-deckers' room and into the Royal Kitchen, and did exactly what Mr. Harris had done. He went rapidly across the kitchen, opened the

small brown door and stepped out into the narrow street. He opened the door of the red telephone kiosk and closed it carefully behind him. He took down the receiver, and when the operator answered he said, "Will you kindly tell the police that a lady has been murdered in the Music Room of the Pavilion? Ask them to come immediately. Thank you very much."

Mr. Pinkerton did not wait to hear the young lady's astonished gasp. He left the kiosk, walked hurriedly through the passage into the Old Steine, crossed to the other side. He was shaking like a leaf. Five minutes later he closed Mrs. Mortlake's door quietly behind him and set off to the railway station. He allowed himself to turn only once at each corner to see if by any luckless chance he was being followed. He was still shaking dreadfully, but he was still able to think; and one thing was very clear to him. He should never again have anything to do with the town of Brighton, or with the Octopus lady; and above all with the obesely dreadful old person whose unfortunate demise was definitely no affair of his.

Or so he thought.

CHAPTER V

THE Chief Constable of South Sussex, with Inspector Johnson, Inspector Voorhees and six of the twenty members of the Criminal Investigation Department of the Brighton Police, entered the Music Room of the Pavilion at just the moment that Mr. Pinkerton scuttled down Mrs. Mortlake's steps. When he came out of North Street and turned into Queen's Road toward the station, the routine of official investigation was in motion, reducing the murder of Marie Louise Isom to a prosaic scientific pattern of motive, means and opportunity.

The burly tawny-hued man who had come in with them, standing in the doorway beside the Chief Constable, watched the ordered movements of the police surgeon, the photographer and the finger-print men with mild blue eyes. It was not often that he was able to view crime from the sidelines. He was thinking, in his deliberate and almost naïve fashion, that murder was like a fire burning a huge, grotesque building in the night. Chaotic colour and conflict transforming it violently, consuming it; and in the grey light of morning nothing there but a sordid heap of miserable ashes.

The Chief Constable, lean and grey-haired, turned to him.

"They've corralled everybody who was in the place in the Red Drawing-room," he said. "Except Miss Arnold. She found the body. She's in the Saloon with Nurse Jessop. The man who rang up seems to have disappeared."

He looked down at the police surgeon, straightening up from the sagging figure in the bath-chair, and smiled grimly.

"I suppose we can be thankful they didn't cut her up and pack her in a trunk. Just hadn't the time, I expect."

The large tawny man nodded soberly. The Brighton trunk murder was still fresh in his memory.

The surgeon, a rotund little man with sparse white hair, put his thermometer in his waistcoat-pocket. "How have the mighty fallen," he said shortly. "I'd hardly recognize her."

The big man in the door followed his gaze, still fixed on the shapeless thing that had been Marie Louise Isom. Her clothes, her stick, her jewels were all there. The iron spirit that had flogged on her great useless body was gone. Death, draining it, had drained all the bitter corroding violence from her face, and left her sagging there, an ignominious depleted husk, at whose voice no one would ever again feel fear, or hate, or despair. Her old eyes were still colourless and staring, but no child or servant or dependent would ever again cringe before them.

The police surgeon closed his bag. "She's not been dead long, Mr. Farquarson," he said. "Under an hour. This knife probably did the trick."

He nodded at the scullery paring knife with pointed blade and brown wooden handle lying on the floor a few feet from her.

"The jugular vein is severed. Shock contributed. Her heart was bad—any way you care to take it. She's dead, anyway. I'll do a post-mortem after I get back from Black Rock. Another ruddy fool has flung himself off the cliff there. I wish you'd put up a net, Mr. Farquarson."

He picked his hat up off one of the gold ball-room chairs stacked together beyond the cord that roped off the main part of the room from the passage reserved for visitors.

A detective-sergeant turned toward them.

"No possibility she did it herself?"

"Not the slightest," the surgeon said promptly. "Look at her hands. Crippled with arthritis. She couldn't have held a knife in them in the first place—not firmly enough. She couldn't have struck a blow like that in the second. She wasn't the woman to do it in the third. I knew her well. Wound's the wrong direction in the fourth. The blade went downward. I'd say, off-hand, someone came up behind her. There wouldn't be any resistance. All over in a second."

For a moment they stood there motionless and silent, as if clearly seeing it all. Someone coming in from the Gallery door, stealthily, a tensed focal point of blood lust, moving to where the old woman sat, alone and helpless with swollen strengthless fingers; the knife poised an instant, the swift blow; one sharp convulsive movement along the mountainous body, a gurgle . . . and silence.

The Chief Constable spoke abruptly. "Well, come along, Inspector."

He turned to the stocky sandy-haired man by the surgeon.

"I'll be back, if there's anything I can do."

Inspector J. Humphrey Bull of the C.I.D., New Scotland Yard, followed the Chief Constable of South Sussex out into the long hall, known in the Pavilion's days of glory as the Chinese Gallery. He looked with a faint surprise at the rocks, trees, birds, mandarins and ladies painted on the delicate peach-blossom ground of the low walls, at the lanterns, dragons and tiny wooden bells.

"The public rooms open into this gallery," the Chief Constable said. "All, that is, except the Grand Saloon. It's in the middle. The Banqueting Room is to the south, balanced by the Music Room to the north. Between them and the Grand Saloon in the middle are the South Drawing-room and the North Drawing-room. Mrs. Isom's companion and the nurse are in the Saloon now, and that's where the attendant

and the ladies from Professor Bolitho's class were when the man with the squint rushed through."

"If he'd got a squint," Bull said.

"Right. Then, beyond the Banqueting Room down there, are the kitchens and the table-deckers' room. And they balance the Royal Quarters at the north end, past the Music Room. There's a tiled passage from the kitchen that opens into the Gallery here."

He put his hand on the delicate bamboo railing of the double staircase to his right. "This goes to the upper apartments. Another one opposite, as you can see. Down there at the south end of the Gallery."

Inspector Bull looked from one end to the other of the long hall. "It's a bit dark," he said.

Farquarson nodded. "I'll have the lights turned on. Even the official guide admits it's dark."

"I was thinking," Bull said, "that anyone could hide here, perhaps, and slip out, easily enough."

"Plenty of ways out. I'm hoping our man thought it was smarter to stay on the spot."

Inspector Bull nodded. "I was thinking of something else," he said. He chewed one end of his tawny moustache reflectively.

The Chief Constable opened the door of the Red Drawing-room. From over his shoulder Inspector Bull looked steadily at the two small groups of people huddled together at opposite ends of the long narrow table. He peered round the door into each corner. The troubled expression on his broad red face relaxed.

"I think, Farquarson, I'll be getting along," he said.

The Chief Constable turned and looked at him, bushy white eyebrows raised. Then he shook his grizzled head vigorously. "Oh no," he said. "Not half. I might not have called you people in, I'll admit that. Now you're here already, I'm just superstitious enough to think maybe you're the hand of Providence. You're staying. I'll get on the phone and ask the C.O. to make you official."

Inspector Bull hesitated. A man got up suddenly from the table.

"Look here, Farquarson," he said. "This is all the most appalling nonsense!"

He came briskly across the room toward them. Inspector Bull looked at him soberly. A tall slender man of about fifty, with curly dark hair greying at the temples, a thin aquiline nose, Guards moustache. His air might have been faintly supercilious, in a polished way, and his light brown eyes were a little too close together. He was, however, Bull thought, just next to being a very handsome man.

Bull noticed the Chief Constable's look of surprise.

"How d'ye do, Mr. Sellers?" he said. "Of course. It's most . . . unfortunate. You know we've got our duty to do. You'll be free to go when we've got your statement. I'm very sorry, about Mrs. Isom . . ."

He continued to look at the man with a faintly surprised questioning air.

Mr. Sellers nodded. "It's shocking, beastly," he said. "It's . . . utterly unbelievable."

His voice, unlike his manner, was curt and hard.

"I know you've got to . . . do whatever you do. What I'm objecting to strongly is your allowing obviously suspicious characters to leave this place absolutely unchallenged."

"Yes?" the Chief Constable said. "What do you mean?"

Sellers turned toward the table and beckoned. Two men there got up and crossed the room. One of them, Inspector Bull saw, was a grey-haired, round-bodied man in a dark lounge suit of professional cut. He had a black despatch-case in his hand. His face was round and plump, and he had a strawberry birthmark over his left temple. The other man was taller, lean, broad-shouldered, under thirty, with dark hair, a set jaw, firm lips and belligerent dark brown eyes. He walked easily with an athlete's stride, was good-looking in an

irregular way, his clothes had definitely been in the rain since they had been pressed, and he was not English. That was obvious even before he opened his mouth, which, Inspector Bull noticed, he apparently had no intention of doing before he had to.

The older man with the birthmark was articulate enough.

"I have a pressing engagement in town, sir," he said testily.

"This is Mr. Marius Evill, Mr. Farquarson," Sellers said. "The Chief Constable. Mr. Evill is Mrs. Isom's solicitor. He also saw——"

"You'll have to stay on a moment, Mr. Evill," the Chief Constable said. "We should have had to call you down here in any case, you realize. This is Inspector Bull of Scotland Yard. Working with us. I'll ask you to hold on a bit while I see about these women."

Inspector Bull, without appearing to do so, caught the sharp glance that Mr. Marius Evill gave him, noticed that Mr. Evill suppressed a look of quick amusement, noticed also that the mark on his temple turned suddenly to a deep purple. Bull could guess without much trouble what Mr. Evill was thinking. Something of the same sort had been evident, or Bull was mistaken, on Mr. Quentin Sellers's clean-cut sensitive face. They were making the error that many people had made when they looked at the gentle blue eyes and the placid face of the big man. Some of those people were still in penal servitude in various of His Majesty's prisons, others had unfortunately been hanged by the neck until dead. It did not offend Inspector Bull that he was often taken to be as simple as he looked. It had frequently been of great use to him.

The attendant with the group of women spoke up earnestly and with some agitation as the Chief Constable came over to them.

"This is a dreadful mistake, sir. These ladies are

members of Professor Bolitho's class in Haesthetic Control. They've been attending a meeting at the Dome, and I've been conducting them personally, all of them, sir, for over an hour. We were all in other parts of the building. The first we knew there was anything wrong was when the man came barging out of the Music Room saying he was calling the police."

Professor Bolitho's ladies suddenly regained their tongues. The Chief Constable eventually made himself heard.

"Very well, ladies. Take them out to Inspector Voorhees in the Red Drawing-room. I'll ask you to leave your names and addresses there. If any of you should recollect anything that seems to you to bear on what happened, please get in touch with me at once."

He turned back. "Now then, gentlemen, I shall have to get a statement from each of you about this."

Inspector Bull, watching from the sidelines still, knowing nothing about Mrs. Marie Louise Isom except that she had been murdered with a paring knife in the great Music Room of the Brighton Pavilion, had come, nevertheless, to some easy conclusions. He summed them up in his mind.

(1) Mrs. Isom, so far as could be judged, was a singularly unpleasant old lady, apparently of considerable income. More than one of her acquaintance might easily have had reasons to murder her or to wish her murdered.

(2) The two men at the end of the table—Sellers and the silent and belligerent young man with the dark hair and clear brown eyes—as well as the solicitor, Mr. Marius Evill, were plainly connected in some way in the Chief Constable's mind with Mrs. Isom.

(3) The ladies of Professor Bolitho's class could be counted on to clutter the investigation of Mrs. Isom's murder with constant and varied recollections, all of which would have to be carefully sifted and evaluated, and none of which would amount to a tinker's damn.

(4) There were certain persons known to have been in the Pavilion at the time of the murder who were not there now.

One other idea, born of long experience, kept swimming into Inspector Bull's consciousness from somewhere in the back of his head.

CHAPTER VI

THE five men sat down at the end of the long table. Mr. Farquarson nodded to the young constable who joined them and was waiting with note-book and pencil.

"Now then, gentlemen."

He turned to the solicitor. "You saw some other persons here?"

Mr. Marius Evill's birthmark had waned into a pale pink. He started to speak. Mr. Quentin Sellers held up a thin, carefully tended hand.

"Perhaps I can save you a bit of time, Mr. Farquarson," he said. "There is one very odd thing about this . . . this horrible thing, that you ought to know about at the outset."

Farquarson nodded inquiringly.

"Mrs. Isom had lately developed an odd—I might almost say—mania for coming to the Pavilion. Just why, none of us knows. Nurse Jessop, who's been in charge of her for several months, is at a loss to explain it."

The Chief Constable stared. "You say it's just lately she'd had the notion?"

"Within a couple of weeks or so. Of course, all of us were there to do anything she wished, but it's been a bit difficult. We put her off till yesterday. I only wish we'd held out and not allowed her to have her own way at all."

Mr. Sellers's head drooped forward for an instant. Bull, watching with placid gaze, saw that he was—or wished to be considered—a deeply distressed man in spite of his confident, brisk and slightly arrogant manner.

"You are connected with Mrs. Isom, of course," Farquarson said.

"As an old and devoted friend—of Colonel *and* Mrs. Isom. I have made my home with them for many years. Eighteen, to be exact."

The Chief Constable nodded. "I knew you'd been with them for some time. When did you notice——"

"Mrs. Isom insisted, this morning, on coming here. I left the house, not wishing to come along, and went to my club in Regency Square. I decided I'd come after all. So I came. I met Nurse Jessop in the Saloon. She said Mrs. Isom was in the Music Room. She had asked to be left alone. We talked a bit. We were still talking, as a matter of fact, when two odd-looking persons came through the rooms."

"They were the suspicious characters you mentioned?"

Mr. Sellers shrugged his immaculately tailored shoulders.

"They were here—they're not here now. A young woman in a pink dress, a man in a lavender shirt and yellow shoes. One or both of them reeked of some awful scent."

"You didn't go to the Music Room when you saw them? I mean, it did not occur to you then that they were particularly suspicious?"

Sellers smiled, raising his brows.

"No. Of course . . . there are always things the point of which doesn't become evident till later. Nurse Jessop was not to return to Mrs. Isom till a quarter to twelve. Mrs. Isom was not a woman whom one disobeyed. That is why I suggested looking at the Brighton prints; and we were up there when Miss Arnold started screaming. We dashed down. You know what we saw."

"You hadn't yourself been in the Music Room at all?"

"That's right."

The Chief Constable nodded, and turned to the man at his side. "And you, Mr. Evill? You saw these people too?"

The strawberry birthmark on Mr. Evill's temple waxed purple, and waned a pale rose. Inspector Bull's deepening interest was not reflected on his sober countenance.

"No, sir," Mr. Evill said. "Not . . . those particular people. Perhaps I should explain first that I am a solicitor."

His manner and language were pompous, Bull thought, but intelligent.

"104 New Square, Lincoln's Inn. Firm of Badger, Luke and Evill. We have been Mrs. Isom's solicitors for fifty-two years, and her father's and grandfather's before her."

The Chief Constable nodded with a degree of respect for the mere fact of British continuity that Inspector Bull understood perfectly, and even shared.

"Sunday morning, before I had really got up, Mrs. Isom communicated with me, summoning me down here, on private business. Very private business indeed."

He looked pointedly at Mr. Sellers, who smiled faintly, and at the rear of the tall broad-shouldered lean young man staring moodily out of the window, his hands thrust deep in his trousers pockets.

"I know, of course, that the police are within their rights in requiring my full co-operation in that as well as in all other matters. But I could wish it to be *privately*, sir."

Farquarson frowned, hesitated and nodded. "In that case, sir, you'd best step along to my office and wait there till I come."

His manner was a trifle short. Inspector Bull was not surprised to see Mr. Evill's tell-tale mark take on a sudden apoplectic hue, nor surprised to see that it was entirely at variance with the ready and pleasant smile on his fleshy face. He watched the solicitor pick up his hat, stick and despatch-case and start toward the door.

Half-way there he stopped abruptly and returned.

"I meant to tell you that while I did not see the two persons Mr. Sellers mentioned, I did see a man in the kitchen while I was in there. He had what I should consider a distinctly furtive air. I have not seen him since, and I should assume there is a possibility that he was here when the murder of Mrs. Isom was committed. Of course, it is not my duty to point——"

"Can you describe him, please," Farquarson said.

Mr. Evill shrugged. "I barely noticed the fellow. He was small. He wore a grey suit and a . . . I think a dark hat. He wore spectacles. Had a guide book in his hand. It was more his manner that I noticed."

Farquarson shrugged in his turn. "All right," he said. "I expect we'll find him."

Mr. Evill closed the door behind him. Farquarson looked at the young man's back.

"His name is Read," Sellers said. The young man turned round, facing them with a quietly set jaw and unfriendly eyes.

Inspector Bull looked at him with a quickening interest. He had observed, in an extensive experience, that one impulsive devil-may-care young man could sometimes do a great deal more to further the ends of justice than he realized he was doing . . . sometimes much more than he cared to do.

"Your name, please?"

"Andrew Read. The address is Baltimore, Maryland, U.S.A. I'm over here looking around, and I'm in Brighton because I got tired of Paris and London."

"You know the Isoms?"

"No. I saw Mrs. Isom once. I went there with a friend of mine from London. He was selling her a car. He was afraid to go alone."

Farquarson nodded. "A good many people were afraid of Mrs. Isom."

The young man shrugged carelessly. His gaze met the Chief Constable's directly for an instant. "I didn't say he was afraid of Mrs. Isom."

"Who was he afraid of, then, Mr. Read?"

"He didn't say, and I wouldn't know."

"I see."

Farquarson glanced at Bull. "And the rest of the people in the house?"

"I know Linda Farrell, Mrs. Isom's ward."

Read took a pipe out of the pocket of his grey flannel jacket and filled it out of an oilskin pouch.

"Was Miss Farrell here this morning?"

Bull glanced quietly from the reluctant face of the young man to the suave, attentive and perfectly composed aquiline face of Mr. Quentin Sellers.

"She was," Andrew Read said shortly.

"Is she . . . where is she now?"

"Home, I imagine. She left early . . . before all this happened."

"When did it happen, Mr. Read?" Inspector Bull said.

The young man looked round at him. Their eyes met, the younger man's direct and unfriendly. Then he grinned suddenly. It was a direct, forthright and ingenuous grin, genuinely mirthful in spite of the trouble in his dark brown eyes. Bull liked him.

"I wouldn't know," Read said. "I meant, she really left here quite early. Long before all the commotion started."

"What were you doing here this morning, Mr. Read?" the Chief Constable asked.

"I came to see Miss Farrell."

"You didn't come with her? You knew she would be here?"

Read nodded. "That's it."

"Did you know Mrs. Isom would be here?"

He grinned again.

"No," he said. "That was the point. She'd forbidden Miss Farrell to see me. We'd hardly have been likely to have come here if we'd known she was going to be here. We'd have . . . gone somewhere else."

The Chief Constable nodded. He glanced at Inspector Bull with a twinkle under his bushy white brows. The twinkle vanished quickly.

"Did you see Mrs. Isom here, this morning?"

Read hesitated. "Yes," he said shortly. "I saw her."

"Where?"

"In there—where she is now. With the big chandelier and all the snakes."

"She was alive then?"

The young man's long fingers tightened on the blackened bowl of his pipe.

He shook his head. "No. She was dead."

There was an instant's silence. "At what time was that, Mr. Read?"

"I couldn't tell you exactly. I looked at my watch when all the racket broke out. That was ten minutes to twelve. I'd say it was eleven-forty when I saw her. Something like that."

"That would be about ten minutes before she was . . . found by those other people?" Farquarson asked evenly. He glanced again at Bull. There was no twinkle in his eyes.

The young man nodded. "Something of the sort," he said coolly.

"You didn't call the police, or notify anyone?"

Read shook his head calmly. "I thought it would be simpler not to bother," he said. He hesitated a moment. "As a matter of fact, I didn't realize at the time that she was dead. I do now."

His brown eyes met the Chief Constable's steadily. Bull, glancing at the friend of Colonel and Mrs. Isom, saw that Mr. Quentin Sellers's face was a study in surprised and little nonchalant avidity. Or was until he saw Bull's gaze fixed on him. He shook his head quickly, murmuring something about the astonishing callousness of the young, particularly the American young.

Bull looked back at Mr. Read. The Chief Constable pushed back his chair.

"You . . . didn't do anything about it?" he asked quietly.

"No. As a matter of fact, I didn't. I only looked in. I'd had some idea of going and talking to her. She was sort of slumped down in her chair. I changed my mind. I only saw her back."

"It didn't occur to you to inquire further into the matter?" the Chief Constable asked. There was a touch of sarcasm in his tone.

Mr. Read smiled pleasantly. "No, it didn't. A lot of people sit with their heads forward. Seem to like it. I didn't know she was dead then. But I didn't see any reason for disturbing her."

"And that would be about twenty minutes to twelve?"

Read nodded. "About."

"Did you . . . see any weapon by Mrs. Isom?"

"No." Read's manner was impatient. "I tell you I thought she was just sitting there. Asleep, perhaps. I was just there a second or so. I didn't see any weapon."

The Chief Constable's bushy white brows rose. He nodded curtly. "I'll have to ask you to stay here for the present, Mr. Read."

He turned to the young constable. "Tell Constable Harman to stay in here with Mr. Read till we get back. Let me have a word with you, Mr. Sellers."

CHAPTER VII

SOME minutes later Inspector Bull followed the Chief Constable down the long dimly lighted Gallery to the South Drawing-room and into the Grand Saloon. The high arched Oriental windows were open, the sun shining on the broad lawn. Beyond it, fifty yards away in the Pavilion Parade, people hurried back and forth, trams, lorries and omnibuses went on their way. No crowd had gathered. Brighton was still unaware of the grisly business going on behind the fantastic arches and gaudy minarets.

Just inside the door Bull gave the Chief Constable a warning touch on the elbow. They stopped and peered out on to the low terrace. A woman in the neat grey uniform of a nursing sister was out there, standing against one of the slender columns, watching the Parade so intently that she did not hear the two policemen.

Miss Amelia Arnold had heard them. She was sitting slumped down in the curving red-velvet wall seat, her angular body flattened concavely against the back. Her eyes were swollen and red, her sallow tear-stained face twitched convulsively. She shrank back with a frightened glance toward the terrace as the two men came up to her.

Farquarson drew up a gilded ball-room chair and sat down in front of her. Bull saw the quick spark of fear in the faded eyes. He had seen it a thousand times, in the eyes of men who were accustomed to being bullied and of women who were poor, friendless or insecure. He also saw the spark of fear die down, as it always did when people saw the kindness in his eyes. Bright clever people made very little impression on Inspector Bull. A lonely, frightened woman always made him

think of the golden-haired girl warm and secure in the semi-detached villa in Hampstead. Not that Margaret Bull was lonely or frightened, but she had been once, the first night he had met her, in the house in Hammer-smith where murder stalked . . . and she might be again. No one ever knew.

Bull stood beside the marble fireplace thinking that, and wondering why, in the light of what the Chief Constable had told him about the Isom household as they crossed the Gallery, Miss Amelia Arnold should be the only one of the murdered woman's dependents who seemed at all upset by her death. He knew from long experience that the status of an unpaid companion can be far less endurable than that of the meanest household servant.

He was also, because of long experience, watching the neat grey figure of Nurse Jessop on the terrace, reflected in the high mirror over the marble mantel . . . which is why he happened to see her turn sharply, her face suddenly alive with alarm, when the Chief Constable spoke to Miss Arnold. He saw it then change as suddenly as if a hard yellow light had been switched off behind it, and assume the brisk kindly efficiency that had made Nurse Jessop a nurse in a thousand. Even Mrs. Isom had thought so, and she had had nearly that many in the fifteen years she had been an invalid.

Nurse Jessop made no move to come inside. Instead she turned back toward the lawn, though not so far, Bull noticed, that one small finely turned ear was not in command of the conversation in the Grand Saloon.

"Miss Arnold," Farquarson said, "I just want you to tell us what happened, in your own way. Take it easy. I can see you're upset, and no wonder. I'll get the constable to take down what you say. If you think of anything else later on we can tell at once if it is anything fresh, or whether we've already got it."

It sounded Jesuitical to Bull, but he supposed Mr.

Farquarson knew what he was about. The young constable drew up a chair and spread out his note-book.

Miss Arnold closed her swollen eyes. "It was so horrible," she said dully. "I wish I'd minded my own business and not gone in there!"

"All right, now," the Chief Constable said kindly. "You've been with Mrs. Isom for years, haven't you?"

"Fifteen years, since my father died. All our money was used up, taking care of him, except a few pounds a year, and she asked me to go to the country with her. I've been with her ever since."

"You must have been . . . fond of her, I expect."

Bull saw that it was meant kindly, but he noticed the touch of doubt that Farquarson could not keep out of his voice.

"I was grateful to her. Maybe, now she's gone, I'll find I was fond of her too."

Bull caught Nurse Jessop's quick, backward glance through the arched, open window. He could see that it was drawing a fine line no doubt.

"Well, tell us just what happened this morning, Miss Arnold."

Amelia Arnold glanced out the window, and moved her spare body forward on the red-velvet seat.

"I came with Linda—Miss Farrell, Mrs. Isom's ward—to do the shopping," she said. Her voice lowered almost to a whisper.

Nurse Jessop moved back a step. Bull knew that even then she could not hear what Miss Arnold was saying. He wondered just how badly she would want to hear it. Quite casually, as if still unaware that anyone but Miss Arnold was in the saloon, Nurse Jessop strolled out on to the green lawn, picked up a dead leaf, and strolled out of sight.

Bull took a quiet three steps to the long velvet hangings. Nurse Jessop had come up on the stone terrace again, and was standing by the open window, so close that he could have touched her.

"My conduct was . . . reprehensible, I'm afraid," Miss Arnold said slowly. "And I suppose quite inexcusable, under the circumstances."

She touched one reddened eye with her moist, wadded handkerchief.

"But there's no use my pretending or denying anything. I've been helping those young people—Linda Farrell and the American, Andrew Read—to meet. Mrs. Isom had forbidden it, strictly and most vehemently. You knew her well enough, I expect, to know that she did everything strictly and vehemently. And I'm really not sorry I did . . . unless this is the result. I mean, I don't think I did anything wicked, or wrong. We were all young once. And he is a perfectly fine young man. And, of course, I don't mean that I *do* think this is a result of what I did, or had any connection with it."

She brushed one grey curling lock of hair off her faded cheek. She was not a bad-looking woman, Inspector Bull thought, if she would get herself up a bit. Never had time, or money, or encouragement, probably, being an old dragon's companion.

"I brought Miss Farrell here, and came in with her. Then I went out. I was going to shop, and meet her later. I went, and stopped at a cake shop in Castle Square. I was there a few moments. When I came out I saw Mr. Quentin Sellers."

Miss Arnold stopped a moment. Her long black-gloved hands were held tightly together, to keep them from shaking violently. She was, however, Inspector Bull saw, a woman of considerable mental strength. In spite of her obvious agitation, her story seemed to be direct and lucid.

"I suppose I needn't tell you that he lives with the Isoms too. I knew he would tell Mrs. Isom if he saw Linda—Miss Farrell—with the young man, and I knew they were together here. He is very careful to keep in her favour in every way he can. I rushed back. He

had gone in. There was a group of ladies at the desk. As I was in a great hurry, I slipped past them and went in through the Gallery door. I'd got to get to them first, and I couldn't wait. I'm quite willing to pay my sixpence, and I shall do it."

The Chief Constable nodded. Sixpence seemed a small matter under the circumstances.

"I crossed the Gallery, expecting they'd have gone on toward the Music Room. They weren't . . . only Mrs. Isom was there in her bath-chair."

Her hands shook, even when tightly clasped.

"I saw at once that she was ill. No one else was in the room. The chair was turned toward the front—toward the Parade—but I could see from just the way she was sitting that she was ill. Her head was slumped forward. She'd had a slight stroke a year ago. I . . . I thought she might have had another. My first thought was to find Nurse Jessop."

"Not to go to her yourself, Miss Arnold?" Farquarson asked.

"No," said Miss Arnold. She shook her head firmly. Bull saw that she was getting control of her nerves. "Never. I shouldn't have dreamed of doing it—for several reasons. I shouldn't have dared in the first place. I thought, at first, that she might have seen Linda and Mr. Read, and that might have been what brought it on. She would have been furiously angry. And if she'd then seen me too, it would have been awful. Do you see? Perhaps you don't, unless you know how arbitrary and domineering she was. No. I thought of nothing, at any time, but finding Nurse Jessop."

"Did you find her?" Bull asked. He watched the nurse's suddenly tensed figure outside the window.

"No. I went upstairs. I saw nobody there except a man in the middle room. I rushed back, thinking she might be in the Gallery. I didn't know where she was. I couldn't find her. I was panicky, I expect, thinking of my own part in it. I went back then to the Music

Room, realized that I'd got to do something in spite of anything she might say to me, and went up to her. I saw then that she wasn't . . . ill."

Miss Arnold stopped for a moment, and went on coolly.

"I saw the knife there, in her throat. I . . . it was too horrible. I . . . didn't know what to do, but I couldn't leave it there. She might not have been dead, really—I didn't know. I took it out, and I was standing there, just like that, when I heard someone behind me. I turned round. It was that detective that's been following me. I . . . we both stood there, until he said, 'What did you do it for?'"

A shiver ran over her body.

"That's when I realized how awful it was. I sent him for help, to get the police. I ran to the Gallery door, but there was still no one out there. Then the guide came in through the other door, where the little man had gone out."

The Chief Constable cast Bull a puzzled glance. "I'm sorry to keep on questioning you," he said. "I can appreciate that it was a terrible experience for you. But—this *detective*? What makes you think he was a detective, and following you?"

"Because he *had* been following me," said Miss Arnold harshly. She sat up suddenly, erect and stiffened.

"And I knew that certain people were going to get a detective," she went on.

"They were?" the Chief Constable said quietly. "Who were?"

"That I can't tell you," Miss Arnold said as quietly.

Inspector Bull took a long step into the room as Nurse Jessop moved swiftly from the terrace and came in casually, as if she had been strolling along outside.

"Oh," she said. "I'm sorry, Mr. Farquarson. I didn't realize you were here."

Bull mentally shook his head. It was not intelligent. One engaged in deception should never make unnecessary false statements.

Nurse Jessop came up to the red-velvet seat, moving silently and swiftly, Bull saw, even when there was no need.

"Are you better, Miss Arnold? I didn't stay here, Mr. Farquarson, because I think it's easier to compose yourself when you're alone. It is for me. I needed it almost as much as poor Miss Arnold."

She gave the Chief Constable a friendly professional smile. There was no hint of coquetry in her wide-set brown eyes, or trace of calculation.

"Do you think I might take her home now?"

Miss Arnold made a motion to rise.

"Just one moment," Farquarson said. "I want to find out about this man Miss Arnold says has been following her. The man who came in when she found Mrs. Isom."

Nurse Jessop smiled patiently. "Miss Arnold is rather upset," she said.

Miss Arnold sank back on the red-velvet seat. Bull, looking placidly at her, wondered. Was she as terrified of the nurse as she appeared? It was evident, he thought, that there was some involved story in the relationships of the Isom household.

"What did he look like, Miss Arnold?"

"He's not tall. Shorter than I am. I'm five feet seven. He's odd-looking. He wore a grey suit."

"Why do you say he was following you?"

The companion's gaze avoided the neat grey-clad figure beside her.

"He came into Lyons' Corner House in the Strand when I was there on Sunday. I happened to notice him when he ordered a second pot of hot water for his tea. I saw him outside in the Strand, then, and he took the same bus to Victoria. I didn't think anything of it till I saw him again, in the train and at the station

here. Yesterday I saw him in the Aquarium, and this morning he was here."

She sat bolt upright again, the indignant colour coming back to her sallow cheeks.

"And where is he now?" she added sharply.

Farquarson started to speak, glanced at Nurse Jessop and changed his question. "Can't you be more definite about what he looked like? His hair, eyes, approximate weight, colouring?"

Miss Arnold stared impatiently at him. She was rapidly becoming herself, Inspector Bull saw.

"How can I? He was most indefinite himself."

She thought a moment.

"He wore a black hat, I think. He had on a grey suit. He had some kind of an impediment in his speech—at least, he stammered a long time before he could say anything. He kept pulling at his spectacles. I'm sure he doesn't wear them except as a disguise. They were some odd shape."

The Chief Constable shook his head at just the moment that a shade passed over Inspector Bull's blue eyes.

"I expect that would be the man that Evill saw in the kitchen," Farquarson said. "We might as well try to find a round medium-sized stone on the beach. However, we'll send out a description. Now then, you get home, Miss Arnold, and go to bed. You stay at home for a day or two. I expect you'll find the press rather annoying for a while.—Have you any questions, Inspector?"

"One," Inspector Bull said. "When you came back, Miss Arnold, did you see Miss Farrell, or Mr. Read, anywhere here?"

Amelia Arnold nodded slowly. "I didn't see Linda Farrell. I saw Mr. Read. He was coming up the stairs at the north end of the Gallery as I came down, after I'd looked for Nurse Jessop."

"That would be just before you went into the Music Room and found Mrs. Isom dead?"

"Yes."

Bull nodded to the Chief Constable.

"All right, Miss Arnold," Farquarson said. He turned to Nurse Jessop. "Now then."

Bull saw the young woman's quick keen glance rest for a moment on Miss Arnold's retreating figure. Her smile was gently pitying as she looked up at the Chief Constable.

"Poor old thing. Wouldn't it be better if I went along with her? She's badly upset."

Farquarson looked after her. "She'll manage, I expect," he said.

Bull hesitated a moment as an idea occurred to him again, got up and followed Miss Arnold out into the Gallery. He watched her hurry uncertainly out of the Pavilion into the grounds, and glanced at his watch. It was after one o'clock. The Pavilion was silent as a tomb.

CHAPTER VIII

MR. ANDREW READ, Bull reflected, would be just along through the door in the Red Drawing-room, waiting for the Chief Constable. The solicitor Mr. Marius Evill would be waiting at the Chief Constable's office in Bartholomews. Mr. Quentin Sellers and the girl Linda Farrell would be at home, presumably; in a few minutes Miss Amelia Arnold would join them. The man seen by Miss Arnold—the same man, no doubt, seen by the attendant when about to call the police, and by Mr. Evill in the kitchen—was gone. So were the pair of unfamiliar figures described by Mr. Sellers. That made, all told, six people who had been in the Pavilion that morning who could be named, and who were connected, directly or indirectly, with the murdered woman.

Bull ticked them off in his mind.

Mrs. Isom's nurse, the brown-eyed blonde Jessop.

Her companion, the spare angular Miss Amelia Arnold.

Her ward, Miss Linda Farrell, description as yet unknown to Inspector Bull.

Her solicitor, the pompous strawberry-marked Mr. Marius Evill.

Her devoted friend of eighteen years' standing, the distinguished-looking Mr. Quentin Sellers, hair greying at the temples, aquiline nose, arrogant expression.

And Mr. Andrew Read, the moody young American with the attractive grin.

There were also, still unknown, the girl in the pink silk dress, the man with the yellow shoes and lavender

shirt, and the very indefinite short man in the grey suit who had been following Miss Arnold about.

Together, therefore, there were definitely in the picture at least nine people, any one of whom, or any combination of whom, could conceivably have killed Marie Louise Isom.

There was more than that to consider, possibly. The Pavilion Parade was barely more than fifty yards across the green lawn from the latticed arches of the Royal Pavilion's stone terrace; and the windows of at least three of the main drawing-rooms that Bull had noticed were standing open. There were also possible entrances into the Music Room at the north end of the Pavilion, where Mrs. Isom was killed, from the King's Apartments, now, Bull had observed, the rooms of the Medical and Chirurgical Society of Brighton—and from the door at the end of the long tiled corridor that led at the other end to and beyond the kitchen where the sign said "Staff Only."

Bull stood in the centre of the Entrance Hall, staring meditatively after the departed form of Miss Arnold, under the large Chinese lantern suspended from a dragon's claws. From the walls a lady in rich yellow costume feeding goldfish in a bowl, and a Chinese grandee giving audience to a suitor, regarded him with painted smiles, as far removed from violent death as they had been from the excesses of the prince who had had them painted there.

Inspector Bull was thinking methodically and soberly, for two or three little points had occurred to him.

The door at one side opened and Inspector Voorhees came into the hall.

"I've got everybody placed at approximately the time of the murder," he said. "Everybody except the man with the yellow shoes and his girl in pink. And I've got a . . . a . . . what do you call those things that change their colour every half-minute? I've got one of them. Listen to this, from that crowd of women."

He read from a note-book:

- “(1) Tall, lean, dressed in a dark-checked lounge suit, with a sinister squint.
- (2) Short, stooped, with horn-rimmed spectacles and spotted tie, foreign, probably German.
- (3) Stooped, short, with moustache and pince-nez.
- (4) Clean-shaven, grey temples, apparent blood-stain on his trouser leg, and a very odd light in his eye.

“Well, they go on like that. That’s the man who came out and told the attendant there was a murder. And we’ve spotted where he went out. There’s a door out of the kitchen, gives into Palace Place. Always kept locked, and it’s unlocked now. The telephone out there is the one he called from. That might have helped us, except that the regular attendant of the cars parked out there is off, and the new chap was too busy to notice anybody.”

A banging at the door, followed by half-heard sounds of heated altercation, interrupted him. A flushed young constable opened the door, standing firmly in it.

“It’s a man, sir, says he’s Colonel Isom. Insists on seeing Mr. Farquarson. What’ll I do? He’s kicking up a row and a crowd’s gathering.”

“Let him in,” Inspector Voorhees said promptly. “Clear the crowd off, and close the grounds.”

Bull saw a tall lank man with lean cheeks and dark hollow eyes, with sandy greying hair and a sandy walrus moustache, also greying. He wore flannel trousers, an old linen jacket and a yellow waistcoat with an eyeglass on a black cord hanging from it, and he burst into the octagonal entry and strode to where they were standing under the Chinese dragon.

“I want to see Farquarson!” he said, in a high nervous voice. “Where is he? Why am I not told about this! Why am I left to learn it from an imbecile female? Good God, man, what’s happened?”

Colonel Isom's voice broke into an hysterical scream.

Inspector Bull spoke quietly: "We'll take you in to the Chief Constable in just a moment, Colonel Isom."

The tall, lean man stared at him stupidly.

"Making a confounded ass of myself, I expect," he said. It was not spoken to Bull particularly, but generally, as if it was a simple statement of fact that for some reason had best be made at that time.

"Where is he? Where's my wife?"

"They've taken her away, Colonel Isom."

Bull wondered if Colonel Isom took drugs, or was drunk, perhaps. His manner was not like that of any military man he had known—not any sober one.

The colonel passed lean tobacco-stained fingers over his high, gaunt forehead.

"Met Arnold out here. She says somebody has killed my wife. That's not right, is it?"

"I'm afraid it is, sir."

Colonel Isom stood there, looking at Bull, for a long time. He tottered then, like a man on whom a hundred years had suddenly fallen, to a chair by the cloakroom door, and sat down heavily, shaking his long head back and forth.

Bull, looking at him curiously, turned. A girl's voice, controlled but urgent, came through the closed door. "But I *must* see him, I've *got* to see him!"

Colonel Isom raised his head. "What's *she* doing here?" he demanded harshly. "Send her home at once. She's not to leave the house!"

The constable at the door thrust a puzzled head inside. Inspector Voorhees nodded. Bull watched as the door opened and a young woman came swiftly in. The door closed behind Miss Linda Farrell.

She stood poised there an instant, her deep-fringed grey eyes moving from Colonel Isom to the two policemen and back again, her red lips parted. As if suddenly alarmed at seeing them there she took a step backward, and slowly pushed her golden hair away

from her forehead with slender sun-tanned hands. Her hands stopped at her temples, paralysed. Her eyes turned to black luminous pools as they reached beyond Inspector Bull to the door between the painted lady in the yellow gown and the Chinese dignitary.

Bull turned. Nurse Jessop was standing in the door. Her efficient brown eyes were calmly taking in the scene. The girl's fascinated gaze was riveted on her.

The door of the Red Drawing-room opened suddenly and Mr. Andrew Read strode out, followed by a protesting constable. He stopped short, staring angrily at them. Bull watched silently: the young man poised there in one door like a tiger ready to spring, the nurse in the other, like a house cat ready to spring, the frightened girl silent and motionless opposite them.

Read took three strides across the room and put his arm round the girl.

"Look here!" he said furiously. "The whole damn pack of you! You're not taking Linda home to that madhouse, do you get that? She's coming with me, now, and you can like it!"

In the instant's silence Bull caught the smile visible for a fraction of a moment on Nurse Jessop's lips. His own sense of humour was not at all acute, and he saw nothing amusing in the scene—barring a wholly frivolous and irrelevant notion that occurred to him suddenly, that his friend and former landlord, Mr. Evan Pinkerton, would have dearly loved to be present. Mr. Pinkerton sought and cherished American expressions.

A voice broke in abruptly. The Chief Constable was in the doorway behind Nurse Jessop.

"Sorry, Mr. Read," he said dryly. "It happens to be quite out of the question. Because you're not going. It is my duty to detain you for questioning concerning the murder of Mrs. Isom. It is my duty also to warn you . . ."

Bull did not hear the rest of the familiar formula. He saw the last vestige of colour seep from Linda

Farrell's delicately chiselled features. Read's arm tightened about her. His face was cool, white and hard.

"That's all right with me," he said quietly. "It's silly, because I don't know anything about it except what I've told you. But this kid's not going back with that pack of wolves, or you'll have another killing on your hands."

Colonel Isom's stick clattered to the floor as he stood up abruptly. His high nervous voice cut across the tensed silence.

"Perfectly agreeable to me," he said. "She's never wanted to be there. No end of people could be slaughtered without the slightest loss to society—ha, ha, ha! I'm afraid my dear wife was one of 'em. Ha, ha, ha! Nurse, the quicker you get back and take charge, the better off we'll be."

He rose slowly, went steadily across the hall and out. Bull, watching him soberly, wondering a great deal about many things, barely heard Nurse Jessop. "Poor old thing!" she murmured.

It was some minutes later that Bull turned out of Castle Square into the Old Steine and through to the Parade. He glanced stolidly at the crowd of people pressing avidly against the stone balustrade that separates the green lawns of the Pavilion from the road, and shook his head. He felt by no means confident that British justice had caught up the alien criminal by the heels with its celebrated despatch and impartiality. It was certainly true that so far as they knew at present young Read was in more or less of a fix. He admitted to have seen Mrs. Isom dead; he had done nothing about it by his own story; no one who had so far given information had seen her dead by that time. Miss Amelia Arnold had found her with the scullery knife in her throat . . . and she had passed Read when she came down the stairs at the north end of the gallery. He had no doubt that it was just before then that Read had been in the Music Room.

Bull shook his tawny head again. Too simple in one sense, it was not simple enough in another. There was point after point against it. It was hard to see the young man normally carrying a scullery knife about with him, or laboriously hunting up one. Americans, of course, did odd things. But while they might, and no doubt did—some of them at least—carry pistols, Mills bombs and bowie knives, they certainly did not, as a rule, carry knives the primary purpose of which was paring potatoes and scraping carrots.

Mr. Andrew Read, furthermore, if he had slain Mrs. Isom in a fit of violent rage, would certainly not have been found later roaming about looking at the coaching and other sporting prints upstairs, as he had been doing when found by Inspector Johnson. Not if Inspector Bull had any knowledge at all of human character.

And still further. Bull had no way of knowing what Nurse Jessop might have said that had led to Read's being detained for further questioning; but it was definitely true that in the other members of the Isom household there were interesting currents and cross-currents of conflict, passion and double-dealing. In Mr. Quentin Sellers and Mr. Marius Evill; in Colonel Isom himself; above all in the demure, efficient and kindly Nurse Jessop.

There was still another vague and remote suspicion that had been for some time in Inspector Bull's mind, and that was giving him more than a little doubt and worry.

He crossed the wide Parade. At Mrs. Mortlake's front steps he stopped, looked up at the number and rang the bell.

CHAPTER IX

MR. EVAN PINKERTON dashed wildly through the barrier just as the 12.10 train whistled and the guards slammed the last door shut. His heart beat furiously as he tugged at the handle of the first third-class carriage he reached. He scrambled inside. The guard banged the door to.

"Almost missed 'er this time, sir," he said cheerfully. Mr. Pinkerton nodded and sank down in a corner. He breathed a long sigh of relief. The carriage was empty except for a man and woman seated opposite each other at the other end, each engrossed in a section of the *Daily Telegraph*. It was neither a corridor train, fortunately, Mr. Pinkerton realized, nor the special train with Pullmans known as the Brighton Belle. He would not have to jump out of his skin every time anybody came through.

He settled his suitcase on the rack over his head and sat down again. At least, he was safe till they got to Victoria, and that would be some little time, for it would be a fairly slow train. He found that a matter of considerable satisfaction, under the circumstances. He settled himself as comfortably as possible against the meagrely upholstered back of his seat, and closed his eyes.

Suddenly he opened them, with a little chill padding up and down his spine. The uneasy feeling had come to him that someone was looking intently at him. He cast a furtive glance at the broad expanses of newspaper that concealed his companions. They were completely oblivious to him. A little ashamed of himself, Mr. Pinkerton looked away, aware that he was being ridiculously self-conscious, and that he had better

snap out of it, as they said in the American pictures, before he made a genuine fool of himself.

The train lurched heavily along. Mr. Pinkerton realized fully that it was not one of the Southern Railway's newest and most modern bits of rolling stock. The whistle sounded a shrill blast, the lights went on, as they lumbered into the long tunnel under the Downs.

It was just then that an incredibly terrifying thing happened. Mr. Pinkerton, staring aimlessly out into the dense black, suddenly felt an icy hand on his heart. Reflected in the dark glass he could see the two people at the other end of the carriage as plainly as if his window was an old looking-glass. The single faded bulb overhead in the centre of the compartment gave virtually no light at all; but the man and woman were still reading their papers.

CHAPTER X

It was very odd indeed, Mr. Pinkerton thought, but it was not as odd or as terrifying as what happened next. Staring, fascinated, into his improvised mirror, he saw the white sheet in the man's hands move slowly down until it came just below his eyes. The flesh on Mr. Pinkerton's spine curled and crept. Two hard shining spots peered at him through crafty narrowed slits, and above them, set on the top of the man's egg-shaped head, was a pork-pie hat.

Mr. Pinkerton's heart sank. He felt with shaking fingers at the tight knot of his purple string tie, and stole a covert glance up at the communication cord. It was too dark to make out the sign up there by it, but he knew what it said. Penalty for Improper Use, £5. He wondered desperately. Would the Southern Railway regard anything short of fire or rape as proper use? He had never heard of anything they had not regarded as improper and collected for.

The train rolled out of the tunnel into smiling sunlit meadows. The peaceful velvet slopes of the Downs receded behind them. Rabbits taking the air scampered back to their holes under the hedges. Mr. Pinkerton kept his watery grey eyes steadfastly fixed on the moving landscape, wishing very much that he was actually a rabbit instead of only looking like one. He wondered vaguely if his palpitating heart would last out the hour or more that he had still got to sit there . . . with Steve and Polly.

The train went on and on, past aerodromes, snug villages and roadside inns. Mr. Pinkerton stole a glance across the compartment. His blood chilled. There was no question about it. The *Daily Telegraph*

was still held in front of each face; but there was no mistaking the yellow shoes, or the pink dress. Then Mr. Pinkerton noticed, in the middle of the page facing him, a small jagged puncture. He looked quickly away, more terrified than ever. It was very easy to see that Steve had been watching him all the time. Mr. Pinkerton could easily imagine that low-browed, wide-mouthed, sullen face behind the paper there. He looked out of the window very dismally, his hand shaking a little.

A miraculous thing happened. The roofs and chimney-pots of Purley came into sight in the distance. The train whistled. Mr. Pinkerton's heart leaped for joy as he realized that this was a slow train, it was about to stop, he could get out, he could get away from the sinister man, obsidian-eyed and terrible, still behind the *Daily Telegraph* in the opposite corner.

He put on his brown bowler unostentatiously, rose quietly and reached up for his suitcase. The train was drawing to a stop. Mr. Pinkerton pulled at the suitcase. Suddenly, without warning, a sharply painful blow caught his ankle and buckled his knees under him.

He let go the suitcase, blinked and swallowed, not entirely sure, in his astonishment, of just what had happened.

The *Daily Telegraph* did not move, but he could see the yellow boot returning to its place; and an ugly voice from behind the paper hissed, "Sit down, you rat!"

Mr. Pinkerton sat down abruptly, folding his hands on his knees to keep them and his knees from shaking noticeably. The pain in his ankle burned like fire. A woman with three children and a baby in arms looked in at the window. For the only time in his life Mr. Pinkerton hoped earnestly that she would decide to come in. He looked at her with what was planned to be poignant pleading. It must however have been a shocking leer, or something, for she gave him one

virtuous glare and moved on, taking with her all joy, all hope. Whistles blew, doors slammed, the train pulled out again.

Mr. Pinkerton sank back in despair. The man with the green pork-pie hat put down his paper.

"Thought yer'd get out, guv'ner?" he inquired unpleasantly, out of one corner of his mouth.

Mr. Pinkerton swallowed and shrank back as far as he could into his corner of the seat. There was no possible doubt but that the man, whatever his name might be beyond Steve, had the most dismal ideas about him. And yet, it was more than upsetting . . . it was astonishing. There was a sort of awful and puzzling interest about it. Even at that moment, wretchedly huddled there on the uncomfortable seat, dreadfully anticipating any kind of thing, Mr. Pinkerton's active little mind was wondering why the man in the pork-pie hat should be acting as he did.

He looked furtively across the carriage and caught the sullen look directed steadily toward him. Steve folded his paper and put it down on the seat. He grinned then, a derisive sarcastic leer.

"Who told you you was a ruddy detective, guv'ner?"

Mr. Pinkerton blinked in astounded consternation.

"Who—me?" he gasped.

Steve nodded slowly. "Look 'ere, guv'ner—who put yer to tailin' me?"

Mr. Pinkerton stared, completely bewildered. He also felt the faintest thrill of pleasure at such a blunder. The man's mouth twisted sideways in what was intended, no doubt, for a foxy grin. It reduced Mr. Pinkerton to incoherence.

"Don't get funny, myte. Wot I wants t'know is, who put yer tailin' *me*?"

Mr. Pinkerton noticed without interest that Polly had put down her paper also and was listening intently. The rouge had come off her lips in the centre where she had been biting them. The rosy glow cast by the

sun through her red straw hat contrasted queerly with the pinched drawn skin about her nose and sullen blue eyes.

"It's a hell of a gime when a boy an' girl can't 'ave a 'oliday at the sea without 'avin' the busies on their tails," she said.

Steve scowled. "You shut yer mouth," he said.

A large piece of the brilliant but inedible seaside confection known, in this locality, as Brighton rock rolled from the young lady's lap on to the floor. Mr. Pinkerton bent forward to pick it up.

"That's 'er rock," Steven said harshly. His tone, to Mr. Pinkerton's mind, was hideous with menace.

"I was only going to pick it up for her," he said hastily.

"Think she's a ruddy cripple? Or is this a blinkin' garden party? She can pick up 'er own rock. Pick it up, girl!"

Polly reached down and picked it up. But she gave Mr. Pinkerton a slightly less hostile glance.

She wiped the sticky exposed end with her newspaper.

"W'y don't you give 'im a chance to sye who put 'im on yer tail, Steve?" she demanded.

Mr. Pinkerton glanced gratefully at her.

"Oh, I . . . I'm not a detective at all," he said hastily. "And I wasn't following you, really, or following anybody, at any time. I . . . I simply didn't want to be mixed up in a murder, and I . . ."

His words trailed slowly out, and changed to a stupefied stare as he saw the expression on their faces. The two mouths dropped open as one. The red Brighton rock stopped half way to Polly's mouth and stayed there, motionless.

Mr. Pinkerton laboured desperately to explain himself.

"Because, you see, I . . . I have a friend at Scotland Yard," he went on breathlessly. "I . . . I didn't want him to find me there."

The eyes of the man in the green pork-pie hat sharpened and narrowed. Their cold unwavering stare held Mr. Pinkerton's alarmed gaze relentlessly. The girl suddenly uttered a stifled cry and put her hand to her mouth. The man still stared silently at Mr. Pinkerton. What little geniality or good-humour there had ever been in his face, wide-mouthed, glistening, narrow-templed, had disappeared. Mr. Pinkerton's voice died away. He moistened his dry lips.

"Yer didn't want t'get mixed up in a murder," the man repeated slowly. Neither his eyes nor his lips moved. "*Whose* murder, guv'ner?"

"Why," Mr. Pinkerton said, "the old woman. The old woman in the Music Room, in the purple——"

The girl's cry was stifled again as the man turned at her with a snarl. He turned back to Mr. Pinkerton.

"Old woman in the purple dress?" he asked slowly.

Mr. Pinkerton, terrified, nodded mechanically. "Yes, of course," he said. "When I saw her, and the woman there with the knife in her hand, I . . . I left as quickly as I could. Of course, I phoned the police, as she told me to do. But I'm not following——"

Steve looked across the compartment at the girl, and back.

"You phoned the police, guv'ner, did yer?"

Mr. Pinkerton tried hard to pay no attention to the tone in which the question was asked.

He nodded. "Yes. I——"

"An' yer got a friend at Scotland Yard?"

"Yes. He . . ."

His voice trailed out again into silence. The man took out his watch, and put it back into his pocket. He rose abruptly, took a step across the carriage and studied the map over Mr. Pinkerton's seat. He sat down again, pulled a roll of one-pound notes out of his pocket, peeled off four and tossed them across to the girl. She caught them, looked silently at him, her face quite pale, and put them into her bag without a word.

The train whistled and slowed down. It would be Streatham Common, Mr. Pinkerton realized. He sat there. When the train stopped Polly got up hastily, nodded to the man in the green hat, opened the door and disappeared without a word.

Mr. Pinkerton sat still, quaking, not even making an effort to leave. Doors slammed, the train lurched forward. Steve sat a moment, staring at nothing. He then turned abruptly to Mr. Pinkerton.

"Nah then, guv'ner," he said. The coldly sinister tone of his voice sent a chill through the shaking little man. "Jus' get off yer clothes. We got eight minutes. Expect I can squeeze into 'em."

He stood up and peeled off his jacket, sat down again and tore at the yellow shoes.

A few minutes later Mr. Pinkerton, alone in the compartment, wiped his forehead with a shaking hand, took down his suitcase and looked about for his hat. He was rapidly approaching Clapham Junction. He knew that unless he wanted to get off in an orthodox fashion in Victoria Station, it was his last chance; and with the man and girl acting in such an odd and terrifying manner, he really did not want to. Then he remembered. Lying on the floor was the green pork-pie hat, and his own brown bowler, choice possession of many years, was at this moment on Steve's egg-shaped head, somewhere in East Croydon.

Mr. Pinkerton picked up the green hat gingerly and brushed it clean. The train slowed down. He fumbled in Steve's waistcoat-pocket and brought out the stub of his monthly return ticket which with his other possessions he had been allowed to transfer from his own clothes. The train came to a stop. Mr. Pinkerton released the door, put the green hat on his head and picked up his suitcase. His knees shook as the train stopped at the platform of Clapham Junction. The hat, he realized, was much too large, pointed though Steve's head was, and altogether he must have looked

like a caricature of an oddment vendor. But that was the least thing he minded.

He hurried across the platform, gave up his ticket at the barrier, and scuttled out into the street. A newspaper seller was putting up hoardings for the evening papers: "BRIGHTON POLICE SEEK MAN WITH SQUINT."

Mr. Pinkerton stared uncomprehending and hurried to the Underground. The hoarding there said: "POLICE HUNT MAN IN GREEN HAT." Mr. Pinkerton shivered. The man opposite him was reading scores on the back page of the *Evening Standard*. Mr. Pinkerton read the front page. "Woman says man police wish to question obviously foreigner," he made out with difficulty. He read on desperately, making out phrase after phrase. Impediment in speech. Guttural tones. Spotted tie. Bloodstain on trouser leg.

He looked down at his legs, breathless and trembling, and shook his head in great relief. There was no stain there, on either of them. Then he remembered suddenly that they were not his trousers. They were Steve's trousers. He giggled hysterically. It would be very odd indeed if the police, somewhere, looking for a man in a grey suit with a bloodstain on one trouser leg, should pick up Steve. Still, it would be equally odd but much more distressing if the police, somewhere between Clapham Junction and Golders Green, looking for a man in a green hat, should pick *him* up.

"Paring knife identified as part of Pavilion kitchen equipment," he read.

He could not make out any more. He pulled the green hat down over his eyes and hunched back in his seat. At Charing Cross he got on the Underground. At Golders Green he got out and hurried down the steps past the line of waiting buses into the street, not daring to look to either side. He went under the bridge and scurried along, faster than he had ever done in his life, and turned into the drab solidly built street where

the house was that had been Mrs. Pinkerton's lodging-house and was now his own.

He opened the gate and ran up the stairs. His hand shook so that the key rattled and stuck. The door opened at last; he burst into the stuffy airless hall. He closed the door quickly behind him. There was no sign or sound of a pursuit in the road.

He staggered to the living-room door, and stopped dead. Seated in the horsehair arm-chair, in front of the fireplace with the pleated paper fan neatly filling the grate, smoking his pipe very calmly as he read the evening paper, was the burly figure of Mr. Pinkerton's former lodger and closest friend.

Inspector Bull looked placidly up from his paper. His eyes travelled slowly over Mr. Pinkerton's preposterous costume. There may have been the faintest twinkle in his eyes.

"I'd not figured you were the chap in the green hat, Pinkerton," he said soberly. "Where's your girl?"

Mr. Pinkerton caught his breath, blushed and choked.

"I . . . I'm not," he said meekly, when he could speak. "This . . . this isn't my hat. I'm the . . . *I'm* the man with the squint. Polly—that's the young lady—got off at Streatham Common. Then Steve—that's the man these . . . these things belong to—made me change clothes with him. He got off at East Croydon. I . . . perhaps I'd best explain the whole thing to you."

"Perhaps you had," Inspector Bull said dryly.

His face did not change, but he did have a slight resemblance to what, in a man less sober and respectable, could have been called shaking with inner mirth. Mr. Pinkerton knew it could not really be that. Nevertheless, he blushed unhappily.

"Well," Bull said, "you'd best change. You can tell me about it at the Yard."

He calmly picked up his paper.

Downstairs again, in his other suit, of shining Sunday

blue that he had not worn since Mrs. Pinkerton had been laid away, Mr. Pinkerton looked dejectedly at the green object lying on the chair, waiting for him. He had never had more than one hat at a time in his life. He started unhappily to put on Steve's. But Inspector Bull had it first.

"I'll take charge of this," he said. "We'll buy you one on the way. I'll take the clothes, too. You can find anybody, with that much to go on."

CHAPTER XI

MR. PINKERTON looked down on the tops of the plane trees already turning sear and brown from the window of Bull's small room at Scotland Yard. The Inspector at his desk was putting into operation the routine machinery that would eventually, and probably sooner than later, land Steve and Polly in the charge-room of some divisional police station.

"Good thing he was foolish enough to change with you," he said, without looking up. Mr. Pinkerton's whereabouts in the room was indicated by the aura of camphor that hung about his Sunday suit. "Then we know his name—first name, anyway—and the girl's. His head's egg-shaped. It won't take long. He'll throw away your hat the first shop he comes to."

Mr. Pinkerton at the window cleared his throat timidly and looked round.

"I wonder," he said, "if . . . well, before Steve got out of the compartment he wiped clean everything he'd touched. It occurred to me then that probably his prints are on record. Only—I noticed he forgot his newspaper."

Bull reached for the telephone. "Good!" he said. "Get me Victoria, the station-master." He looked back at Mr. Pinkerton. "They'll probably have turned out the carriages by now."

Mr. Pinkerton moistened his lips.

"Well," he said timidly, "I thought . . ."

He took the folded newspaper out of his pocket.

Bull put down the phone. "Good!" he said soberly. His face, while it of course did not beam, nor would Mr. Pinkerton ever have dreamed it would, still had a look of restrained approval . . . much as if the backward

child of a dignified parent had shown a flash of unexpected intelligence.

Bull picked up the phone again. "Never mind Victoria. Send Donaldson up."

He took the paper. Mr. Pinkerton's small lined grey face flushed with pleasure. It was one of the few times that his efforts in the field of crime had brought out unqualified praise.

"Well, I guess that's in the bag," he said happily.

Bull looked at him with a puzzled frown.

"I mean," Mr. Pinkerton explained, blushing, "that that's what they say in America when the outcome of anything is . . . is pretty definitely settled."

Bull grunted. "Then I expect Steve's in the bag," he said tolerantly. "I'd not be surprised if he was in the dock as well."

It was only a few minutes later that Inspector Bull bisected a sardine sandwich and washed it down with a tremendous gulp of tea, in the third-class Pullman.

The Brighton Belle slipped along through the pleasant Surrey countryside. Mr. Pinkerton, across the table, munched a large piece of sultana cake and stirred his tea with some excitement. He continued his narrative, taking great pains to make it as direct, orderly and detailed as he could. It was most odd. Inspector Bull, intent on his sandwiches and tea, said very little, but Mr. Pinkerton knew he was listening with a trained and methodical attention that seldom missed a trick. What little he did say added hugely to Mr. Pinkerton's excitement, for it made nothing clearer than that Mr. Pinkerton had stumbled, by sheer chance, directly into the middle of an ingenious and complicated pattern of events. Who the odd people he had met and heard were, Mr. Pinkerton did not know, but it was more than likely that most, if not all, of them were deeply concerned.

Mr. Pinkerton stirred with a nervous thrill as he

realized that he had once again, and in spite of all his well-meant efforts to be sane, sensible and law-abiding, got himself directly into the very heart of a murderous crime. And while he had shared, under Bull's wing, in the investigation of many crimes, he could not off-hand remember any that presented, on the face of it, such bizarre and fascinating elements. The cool daring of the murder, in a public room of one of Britain's showplaces, with people coming and going right and left; the presence there—if not at the actual time of the murder, at any rate very soon before and after—of so many people whom he knew to be connected with the old woman in purple; above all, those odd people whom he did not know to be connected with her, but whom he had himself seen in the Pavilion. And the odd way they had acted.

Mr. Pinkerton sighed with great enjoyment. It was all very fine, remarkably fine. Much of it he could not understand at all; for instance, Polly and Steve, the odd conduct of the grey-clad nurse, or why the Octopus woman had thought he was a detective—if she really had thought so. The oddest thing of all, he was quite sure, was the nearly mad conduct of the man who called himself Harris if Mr. Pinkerton was asked.

"The inquest is to-morrow," Bull said. "Farquarson's a good man. So are those two Inspectors, Johnson and Voorhees. As a matter of fact the Brighton force are about the best in England. They're ahead of the Metropolitan Force in some ways. Every constable's equipped with a pocket-receiving set. No time lost when fast work's wanted."

Mr. Pinkerton listened respectfully. He did not wish to appear to be taking issue, of course, with a prominent and successful member of the Criminal Investigation Department of New Scotland Yard. At the same time, pocket-receiving sets or no pocket-receiving sets, he could not but feel that in the present instance they had made at least one grave blunder.

"Why are they detaining Andrew Read?" he inquired, with a tentative stubbornness.

Bull shook his head. "I didn't hear, exactly. I thought I'd best get hold of you as soon as possible. They want to question him. I expect the nurse may have told Farquarson something. Farquarson usually knows what he's doing. Then Read, of course, saw the old woman dead, there, and did nothing about it, according to his own story. It doesn't sound right. He was the first to see her dead, as far as can be made out."

He shook his head meditatively. "It's a very odd case," he said. "This man Harris, now. He went out the kitchen door before you heard the nurse and someone talking?"

Mr. Pinkerton nodded. "Yes, and just before the man with the strawberry mark on his temple came out of the vegetable kitchen into the great kitchen."

"Vegetable kitchen?"

"That's what the guide book calls it. It's at the extreme end of the tiled corridor. I didn't go in there myself, but he came out of it after Mr. Harris had gone out. He must have been in there when Mr. Harris came into the main kitchen."

"And the nurse and some man were in the . . . the table-deckers' room while you were in the kitchen, before Harris came in."

"That's right," Mr. Pinkerton said. "She said something like 'They'll show up; one sight of them is all we need; she's weakening, that will do it.' Something like that. And he said, 'I hope you're right, Rita.' She said, 'I know I'm right.'"

Bull looked thoughtfully at the little man opposite him.

"And Mrs. Isom didn't seem to want to go to the Pavilion at all?"

"Oh no, definitely not," Mr. Pinkerton said positively. "She wanted to go to the Sea Front. The chauffeur said it took a cool hand to manage the old . . . the old

lady. He didn't call her that, really. What I couldn't see was why, if she was going to the Pavilion, they didn't drive her up to the entrance. It would have saved all the trouble of wheeling her round."

Inspector Bull chewed the end of his tawny moustache, which he only did when he was thinking. "It is queer," he said. He got out a note-book and pencil. "Now let's straighten out these times," he said.

Ten minutes later they were both looking down at the list of Mr. Pinkerton's activities that morning after he had left Mrs. Mortlake's premises, arranged and approximately timed to the best of Mr. Pinkerton's memory and intelligence.

Pinkerton leaves Mrs. Mortlake's	.	.	10.45
Meets Mrs. Isom in Rolls	.	.	10.55
Enters Pavilion	.	.	11.08
Meets Mr. Harris in kitchen	.	.	11.17
Meets man with birthmark	.	.	11.20
Overhears Nurse Jessop	.	.	11.24
Nurse Jessop goes away	.	.	11.25
Pinkerton overhears Miss Farrell and Andrew Read	.	.	11.32
Linda flies out of room	.	.	11.34
Read goes back into main part of Pavilion	.	.	11.34
Pinkerton meets Steve and Polly getting out of the Pavilion	.	.	11.38
Attendant and women come in	.	.	11.39
Pinkerton sees Octopus woman at bottom of staircase in the Gallery	.	.	11.42
Enters Music Room	.	.	11.47
Reports to Attendant	.	.	11.50
Telephones the police	.	.	11.53
Leaves Mrs. Mortlake's again	.	.	12.03
Takes train at station	.	.	12.10

"Very good," Inspector Bull said. "Now then, Pinkerton. That door in the kitchen. Was it locked when Harris went out?"

Mr. Pinkerton had to think for only an instant.

"No," he said. "When he went out he fumbled with it for an instant, as if he'd expected it to be locked, and it wasn't. I didn't think of that then, but later when I went out there myself, and found the catch off, I decided that that was it."

Inspector Bull chewed at his moustache again.

"And there's another thing I'd like to know, too," Mr. Pinkerton went on. "How *could* that woman that I met in the Aquarium have got it into her head I was a detective? And who did she think I was supposed to be following—her, or Miss Farrell and the young man?"

"I don't know," Inspector Bull said simply. "It looks, on the face of it, as if there's some kind of a conspiracy over those two young people, with that woman you met—her name's Amelia Arnold—on their side, and the whole crowd of 'em except her on the other side. I don't know just what the other side is. It would seem there'd be more to it than just the girl and the young American."

The Brighton Belle flashed into the tunnel under the South Downs and out again. The solid roofs of the great seaside town came quickly into view. Mr. Pinkerton looked out at them, off to his left. You never realized, when you merely walked along the Sea Front, he thought, what a tremendous number of people actually lived in Brighton.

The train slipped on velvety wheels through the complicated metal maze of the station and came to a stop. The big man and the little man stepped out on to the platform and made their way to the police car waiting in Queen's Road. A few minutes later they entered the Green Trout Inn and took the lift to a small room on the third floor. The Chief Constable himself and Inspector Voorhees, stocky and sandy-haired, were hard at work.

A steamer trunk with "A. J. R., Baltimore, Mary-

land, U.S.A." painted on it stood open and emptied in one corner. Two suitcases, also open and emptied, lay in the middle of the room. A pile of papers, a couple of magazines and several sixpenny paper-backed novels littered the table by the window. Mr. Farquarson was going through Andrew Read's effects with a careful eye. He nodded as they came in, glanced at Mr. Pinkerton sharply under bushy white eyebrows for an instant, and handed Bull a small sheaf of transatlantic cablegrams. Mr. Pinkerton, edging up and peering round his elbow, read them one after another with great curiosity.

"MOTHER AND I STRONGLY ADVISE LEARN GIRL'S NAME BEFORE MARRYING HER DAD," the first one said. The date was 20th July.

26th July. "STRONGLY SUGGEST YOU RETURN HOME AT ONCE DAD."

29th July. "NOT A PENNY STOP COME HOME DAD."

30th July. "FIFTY DOLLARS LAST YOU'LL GET FROM ME DAD."

2nd August. "INSIST YOU COME HOME FATHER."

Mr. Pinkerton read on as Inspector Bull turned them over one by one, with an increasing interest and pleasure.

4th August. "WORK WAY BACK STOP TRY CATTLE BOAT STOP REFUSE SEND MORE MONEY C P READ."

5th August. "THIS HUNDRED DOLLARS ABSOLUTELY FINAL STOP COME HOME AT ONCE DAD."

7th August, Mr. Pinkerton felt, was even more alarming. "O K STOP STAY AND STARVE C P READ."

And the last one was dated only two days before the murder of Mrs. Marie Louise Isom.

"ALLOWANCE CUT OFF UNTIL YOU COME TO YOUR SENSES STOP REFUSE SEE YOU MAKE WORSE FOOL OF YOURSELF STOP GLAD GIRL HAS MORE SENSE THAN YOU STOP YOU CAN'T POSSIBLY SUPPORT WIFE STOP DON'T ASK MORE MONEY YOU WON'T GET IT STOP REFUSE RECEIVE MORE COLLECT CABLEGRAMS STOP ACCOMPANYING HUNDRED

DOLLARS ABSOLUTELY LAST STOP HAVE ARRANGED AMERICAN EXPRESS SUPPLY YOU SINGLE THIRD-CLASS RETURN C P READ."

Inspector Bull finished the last message and handed the sheaf back to the Chief Constable. Mr. Pinkerton finished it a little before Inspector Bull did, with a sigh of romantic enjoyment. He followed Bull's glance at the two empty travellers' cheque folders lying on the table.

Mr. Farquarson put the cablegrams down on the table, looked once more about the room, drew up a chair and sat down.

"I've found out a few things about Mr. Andrew Read," he said. "He's been going a stiff pace. He got into some kind of a jam in Paris and spent two nights in jail. His family's through with him, so definitely that when I offered to communicate with them through the American Consul he said it was no use, they'd be glad to see him where he couldn't get into any more trouble. He's apparently head over ears in love with this Linda Farrell. I gather there's some truth in his idea that things aren't too easy for her at the Isoms'."

A troubled shadow clouded Inspector Bull's placid blue eyes. Mr. Pinkerton, stiffening with annoyance, gazed at him impatiently. He even went so far as to prod his elbow, a liberty he had hardly ever before taken. Bull stood there stolidly, saying nothing at all. Finally, Mr. Pinkerton had waited as long as he could.

"That doesn't show he murdered Mrs. Isom, does it?" he demanded boldly. He regretted it, of course, the instant the words had left his mouth. Both Bull and the Chief Constable stared round at him, not precisely dumbfounded, but most surprised.

"Possibly not," Mr. Farquarson said dryly. His eyes then opened a little as he looked at Mr. Pinkerton closely for the first time. He hesitated for an instant, remembering something that Sir Charles Debenham,

Assistant Commissioner of the Metropolitan C.I.D., had said when he phoned through asking for Bull to be officially assigned. This would be the little chap Debenham had mentioned, though there was nothing extraordinary about him that he could make out. Except his odour; the Chief Constable had never liked the smell of camphor.

"Possibly not," he said. "It happens that Mrs. Isom was alive when she was brought to the Pavilion. Very much alive. Before Nurse Jessop left her there in the Music Room she spoke very harshly about Mr. Read and her ward Miss Farrell. Read may even have heard her. He was there, according to his own story; I mean somewhere in the Pavilion at the time. He admits going in to the Music Room after Miss Farrell had left him. Mrs. Isom was dead when he left the Music Room. He admits that, even. So far as we know, she was not dead when he entered the room. He went on upstairs. If he went in there and found Mrs. Isom dead, why didn't he call us, or do something? The evidence—so far—all points to the fact that he killed her."

"But . . . what for?" Mr. Pinkerton demanded stoutly, and instantly stood aghast again at his temerity.

"Among other things," the Chief Constable said quietly, "for five thousand pounds in cash."

Mr. Pinkerton stared at him open-mouthed.

"Which is a good deal of money, even to an American," Mr. Farquarson added dryly. "Especially when he's openly and obviously out of funds, his hotel bill hasn't been paid for three weeks and his family are completely out of patience with him."

He nodded at the cablegrams on the table, and turned to Inspector Bull with a dry chuckle.

Bull looked at him with a sober heightening of interest that in another man would have been a stare as open-mouthed as Mr. Pinkerton's.

"She had that, on her person?" he inquired calmly.

Farquarson nodded. "She had it, in a small black leather envelope on her lap. It was there, according to Nurse Jessop, who brought her in. Noakes, the chauffeur, says she had it. So does the chairman. And it's gone now."

Mr. Pinkerton nodded mechanically. He clearly remembered seeing the nurse put the black leather envelope into the old lady's helpless hands.

"She also had a diamond clip and twenty pounds in notes in her handbag," Farquarson went on. "The bag was hanging on the arm of the bath-chair. It's still there. The clip and the twenty pounds are gone too."

"When did you learn this?" Bull asked soberly.

"The solicitor chap, Evill, told me he'd brought the money down from town this morning. We checked that at the Isom house. She was seen putting it in the envelope. Miss Arnold knew she had the clip; so did the nurse. They knew she had the twenty pounds. We've got four men searching the Isom house, and eleven searching the Pavilion. However . . ."

The Chief Constable shrugged. "If we'd known it sooner——"

"Why didn't Evill tell you at once?"

"He didn't know she had it with her. Or so he says."

Mr. Pinkerton recovered from his shock. This complicated matters greatly, or could. Still. . . . Mentally, though not outwardly, he shook his head with native stubbornness. It had no connection with Andrew Read. Mr. Pinkerton had not watched the young man pacing the stone walk in front of the Brighton Aquarium, with the rain running in rivers from his hat and shoulders, waiting for Linda Farrell—or read C. P. Read's stuffy cablegrams denying true love its way—for nothing. Neither had he spent a large part of his waking hours at the cinema without having learned its lesson.

"Did you find the five thousand pounds, and the

twenty pounds, and the diamond clip, on Mr. Read?" he demanded stoutly. He stole an apologetic glance at Inspector Bull, astonished at his own forwardness. Bull shook his head, but there was the shadow of the vestige of a rudimentary smile on his broad red face.

Mr. Farquarson was a little annoyed. "We found a hundred pounds on him," he said shortly. He tapped the yellow sheaf of cablegrams on the table. "Which is a bit queer considering these."

"Yes," Mr. Pinkerton admitted. "But . . . the notes? And the clip? And, after all, a hundred pounds isn't five thousand, or . . . or even twenty."

"I know it's not," Farquarson said. He frowned. "It's not certain, of course. Read didn't leave it—so far as we know. We've found nothing in the Pavilion so far but Miss Arnold's umbrella in the Gallery. He could have had outside help. The couple we're after, in the yellow shoes and the pink dress. Or the chap with the squint in the grey suit. One of them may have got the stuff from him, if he did take it."

Mr. Pinkerton blinked and felt nervously for his purple-string cravat in his celluloid collar. He glanced apprehensively at Inspector Bull. This was taking an unexpected turn. "Oh dear!" he thought. Then, before he could stop himself, he said hastily, "Oh, I'm sure I didn't do anything of the sort!"

Farquarson looked at him uncomprehendingly. Then, as the little man's words penetrated into his mind, his bushy white brows drew sharply together. He stared, his lined face darkening slowly.

"What's that?" he said emphatically.

Mr. Pinkerton looked in mute appeal at Inspector Bull.

Bull almost chuckled, which he had only actually done three or four times in all Mr. Pinkerton's life.

"This is the man with the squint," he said calmly.

CHAPTER XII

THOUGH the Chief Constable's attitude, as well as one or two of his remarks, had not been thoroughly complimentary, at least, much to Mr. Pinkerton's relief, he had not immediately hurled him out of the window on to the Sea Front four storeys below. He had become quite civil, eventually, and next to friendly even, when it had become apparent to him that in the little grey man they had found, by pure luck, a rather important and thoroughly reliable witness. Better still, he seemed quite willing to take Mr. Pinkerton at Inspector Bull's word, and made no objection even to his going along with them in the big police car to Sussex Square.

Mr. Pinkerton had a vague feeling, however, as he sat between the large figure of Inspector Bull and the lean figure of the Chief Constable, that he was not yet entirely free of suspicion, in Mr. Farquarson's mind, of some undefined sort of complicity in either the murder of Mrs. Isom or the disposal of a diamond clip and five thousand pounds in cash—or both.

He hoped very much that Steve and Polly would be located rapidly.

The car sped along the Sea Front past the Palace Pier and the Aquarium, along King's Cliff to Kemp-town, turned at the bright awnings and umbrellas of Black Rock Pool into Lewes Crescent, and drew up at 91 Sussex Square. Mr. Pinkerton, looking at the imposing mansions that form three sides of the wide green square, carefully fenced and bolted against the public, blinked in some surprise. These houses were as handsome, in their way, as those in Bath. There was an air of solid aristocracy about them that made the Bath houses old and gentle, and a bit decadent, in some way.

The Chief Constable had said, coming out, that most of these great mansions had been made into flats, because people couldn't afford to keep them up these days. Nevertheless, they retained their dignity. At least they had not been turned into hotels, as so many great houses along the Marine Parade and in King's Road had been. They had none of the bed-and-breakfast air that certain squares had, for instance, or some of the Marine Parade houses. In a royal town where democracy had levelled everything to a thousand varying social strata, Sussex Square had kept, at least outwardly, its air of dignity and opulence.

Mr. Pinkerton waited eagerly while the Chief Constable rang the bell. His first discovery came promptly. He nudged Inspector Bull's elbow when the butler opened the door and stood aside for them to enter. He was a slender man of medium height, with a white skin and black hair, with side whiskers.

"That's the chauffeur, Noakes!" he whispered.

He was about to remind Bull that it was this man who had referred to his late mistress with such a shocking term. But he changed his mind as the man's peered, slightly protruding dark eyes rested on him for an instant, passing over him as a cold draught passes and lingers in the sensory nerves for a moment after it has passed. Mr. Pinkerton moved a fraction of an inch nearer Bull. He had not counted on Noakes's remembering him.

The man closed the door noiselessly. "This way, please."

They followed him up a broad heavily carpeted stairway, heavy boots ringing on polished brass stair-rods. The white marble figure of a nude lady holding an urn stood in the niche at the turn of the stairs. Balanced dangerously on the newel post at the top step was a sparsely draped lady in bronze, holding an electric orange-coloured flambeau in one hand and clusters of grapes in the other. Beyond her, in a second

niche in the side wall, an almost life-size blackamoor ogling an unseen Desdemona held aloft a lighted globe made of clustered fruits on a crystal platter.

Mr. Pinkerton looked about him with great admiration. A large selection of native weapons—or canoe paddles, he could not decide which—was displayed, fan-shaped, over the door at the end of the hall where Noakes was leading them. As he opened the door softly, Mr. Pinkerton, peering round the others, his heart beating rapidly, looked into a large and very dark room, lighted by more odd-looking fruit-and-flower clusters and more flambeaux held aloft by more nudes and semi-nudes, standing at attention behind ottomans and elaborate rosewood chairs, or balanced on black tables inlaid with mother-of-pearl.

In the overcrowded, airless room six people sat, rigid and silent. The only movement Mr. Pinkerton could see was in Nurse Jessop's white efficient hands as she closed the tea caddy and turned the tiny silver key in the lock. It was like a poem . . . Wordsworth, Mr. Pinkerton thought. A party in a parlour, some sipping punch, some sipping tea—all silent, and all damned. Or something like that.

As they came into the room a man seated at the high book-filled secretaire pushed his chair back and got up. Mr. Pinkerton stared at him blankly, and clutched at Inspector Bull's sleeve.

"Sorry to have to trouble you, at a time like this, Colonel Isom," Farquarson was saying.

Mr. Pinkerton whispered frantically: "That's Mr. Harris!"

Bull nodded, having had no doubt at any time that it was Mr. Harris. He was looking at Linda Farrell. She sat, white and still as one of Mrs. Isom's marble nymphs, though fully clothed in a densely black frock high at the neck, in the centre of a white-tufted satin sofa, her tea-cup in her lap, her grey eyes fixed directly in front of her. There was nothing dead or remote

about her, however. She was taut as a hair-trigger, her eyes burning. Bull's mild blue gaze rested steadily on her for an instant.

Mr. Pinkerton edged into the room behind them and sat down on a narrow horsehair seat close to the door. Bull and the Chief Constable threaded their way through the dim maze of needlepoint stools, tiny tables, and satin and horsehair sofas into the centre of the heavy room.

Suddenly, with no warning, Linda Farrell rose from her place, vivid, flame-tipped, passionate, and flashed across the room to the long windows, shrouded in deep wine-coloured velvet. She tore the dark curtains apart with a wild sweep of her hands. The late August sunlight flooded the crowded room, lighted her bright hair into burnished gold above her pale passionate face and shining eyes.

Every one stared. Only Mr. Pinkerton, probably, understood, and he understood exactly. He had done the same thing himself, though not in such a wild abandon of passion, the day he came back from seeing Mrs. Pinkerton returning dust to dust . . . the very day, he thought suddenly, on which he had last worn his blue suit. He had not, of course, done his curtains with that swift young defiance. He had crept up on them, so to speak, and opened them just half-way, glancing terrified over his shoulder even then to see if Mrs. Pinkerton had risen at the monstrous betrayal, and was standing in the doorway watching the pale winter light seeping in on the moss-rose pattern of her best Wilton rug.

So Mr. Pinkerton understood Linda Farrell instantly and entirely. He also understood the stupefied expression on Amelia Arnold's drawn sallow face as the girl ripped apart each wine-velvet shroud.

The last curtain torn back, the girl turned and faced them like a wild beautiful thing at bay.

"I shan't live in the dark any longer!" she cried. "I shan't do it!"

Her voice was taut, like the sound of warm tearing velvet.

Nurse Jessop moved abruptly, knocking a cup off the silver tray. It shattered into fifty delicate pieces. Linda Farrell's eyes widened. She shrank back against the windows. Mr. Pinkerton understood that too. She was remembering. He could see her, remembering the bitter iron-jawed face of her guardian, just as he had remembered Mrs. Pinkerton's that day—vinegary, grey wispy-haired. He saw a quick dry sob catch at the girl's throat. She turned slowly and touched the curtains to draw them again.

"Leave them open, Miss Farrell."

Inspector Bull's deep kindly voice sank into Mr. Pinkerton's ears like Balm of Gilead. He blinked his watery eyes and adjusted his spectacles with trembling hands. Linda Farrell went slowly, with uncertain steps, to where Amelia Arnold sat, bolt upright in a high-backed Victorian chair, and sank down on a stool at her feet. She buried her head in the older woman's lap, sobbing.

"I think you'd best allow me to call Doctor Truslow, Colonel Isom," Nurse Jessop said. "We're having rather too many scenes."

Her smile was a little ironic, Mr. Pinkerton thought. It occurred to him, looking at the yellow-haired young woman, that he disliked her very much.

Linda's quivering body stiffened. Miss Arnold's work-roughened hands held her gently. She bent down and whispered something quickly, raised her head and looked appealingly at the Chief Constable.

Mr. Pinkerton, though he had shivered a little himself at the sound of her voice, promptly and gladly swallowed all the bitter words he had spoken about the late Mrs. Isom's companion.

The dark fleshy man patted his moist brow with a wilted handkerchief. Mr. Pinkerton, gazing avidly round the circle, noticed the mark on his temple.

"We're all a bit overwrought," Mr. Marius Evill said, with some dignity. "I agree, however, that Miss Linda's idea was a good one."

"Need light on the subject," Colonel Isom remarked. "Ha, ha, ha!"

He sank back into silent indifference. Mr. Pinkerton stared at him. He apparently was just the same, as Isom or Harris.

The solicitor looked at him queerly for an instant. "I never understood, I must say, why dear Marie Isom insisted on being so . . . so hermetically sealed."

"Sunlight ruins carpets," said Miss Arnold. She patted the girl's bright head.

Mr. Quentin Sellers uncrossed his long legs and crossed them again.

"There are several matters to be cleared up, ladies and gentlemen," the Chief Constable said. "I'm sorry, but it's necessary to do it as quickly as possible. We have certain information that it's necessary to act on at once. Colonel Isom, were you aware that when your wife left this house this morning she had a large sum of money in her possession?"

Colonel Isom's bony hand closed about his jaw as if he were stroking a luxuriant beard. He shook his head indifferently.

"Can't say I did. In fact, can definitely say I didn't. In fact, I wasn't here when she left the house. Wasn't aware she was leaving it, in fact. Fact is—ha, ha, ha!—I really knew very little, very little, of my wife's affairs, important or unimportant. Cared less."

"She hadn't, then, discussed with you her reasons for sending for Mr. Evill?"

"Wasn't aware," Colonel Isom said jerkily, "at any time, that she'd sent for Evill. Never could see any reason for sending for Evill, at any time. Never regarded him as a necessary Evill—ha, ha, ha!"

The solicitor's strawberry mark bloomed darkly.

"Oh, I say, Colonel!" Quentin Sellers protested, with an amused deprecatory smile.

Farquarson turned to the others:

"You no doubt have heard," he said slowly, looking intently round the little circle of faces, "—you may have known before, that Mrs. Isom had in her possession this morning the sum of five thousand pounds in cash."

"In a leather case," Mr. Evill added.

Farquarson nodded. "That case has disappeared. And with it the money. There has also disappeared a diamond clip that was in her handbag, and a small sum of money also in the bag."

Mr. Pinkerton, staring excitedly about from his perch by the door, felt the latent air of hostility in the room become almost electric in its sudden intensity.

"Mrs. Isom had a leather envelope in her hands when I left her—at her request—in the Music Room," Nurse Jessop said, in a quietly matter-of-fact voice. "I offered to take it for her. She had trouble holding it, of course. It kept sliding off her lap. She was most definite about not allowing me to touch it, except to pick it up and hand it back to her. I had no idea it had anything valuable in it."

Mr. Pinkerton's gaze moved to Linda Farrell. She had sat up and was looking at the nurse with blank unfriendly eyes. Miss Arnold still held her hand tightly. It seemed to Mr. Pinkerton that she was forcibly keeping the girl from saying any of the things she felt.

"And you, Mr. Sellers?" the Chief Constable asked.

The thin-faced man shook his head in surprise. "I didn't see Mrs. Isom at all, at the Pavilion," he said quickly. "I thought I'd explained that. I knew, of course, that she was going to the Pavilion. She wanted me to go too."

Mr. Pinkerton caught his breath.

Bull leaned forward slightly. "Why would she want to go there this morning, Mr. Sellers?"

"No idea,' sir,' Sellers said. Then he laughed easily. "That's not quite true, Inspector. The old habit of taking and obeying Mrs. Isom's orders is too strong to throw over instantly."

"Meaning?" Farquarson asked.

"That Mrs. Isom didn't want it known she was going there."

Mr. Pinkerton, his heart beating with excitement, wondering more than a little what all this meant, recalled the old woman's vigorous protests against being taken to the Pavilion and the calm way in which Nurse Jessop had ignored them. He glanced covertly at her. She was looking at Sellers, calm, clear-eyed and practical.

"I gathered she was meeting someone at the Pavilion, and didn't want any of the people round here to know it."

Sellers looked at the dead woman's female companion and her ward. His glance then rested easily for an instant on her husband and her solicitor.

"I expect she didn't trust many people . . . with what reason I don't know, of course."

"She did trust you?"

Sellers looked at Inspector Bull. But of course, as Mr. Pinkerton recognized with a thrill of knowing pride, there was no hint of anything but the utmost simplicity in Bull's face or voice.

"Yes. I think she did, sir. I . . . expect we always know who the people we can trust are."

A sudden thrill of keen excitement shot over Mr. Pinkerton. That was it, of course. He had been trying to think where he had heard that voice. It was Sellers, of course, that he had heard talking with the nurse in the Pavilion, when he had first gone to the Royal Kitchen; trusting it would be all right, making love to her, or trying to, and being repulsed . . . temporarily, at least. Her cool hard voice, low and clear, rang in Mr. Pinkerton's ears: ". . . not here—it's too dangerous."

CHAPTER XIII

HE looked over at Inspector Bull significantly, and blushed as Bull shook his head.

"She seemed particularly anxious no one should know where she was going," Quentin Sellers was saying. "I begged off. Which you'd know means being pretty abject, if you happened to know Mrs. Isom."

"Why did you do it?"

"I didn't just like the appearance of the thing. She wouldn't say what it was about. I got the idea that something odd was going on."

"Why did you, Mr. Sellers?"

"Chiefly from the fact that Evill was here from London. And that Miss Arnold had been in London a few days ago."

"You knew she had a sum of money with her?"

Sellers nodded coolly.

"I didn't know it, really. I guessed as much. In the years I've lived here I've learned that when she summoned Evill down it was because she wanted ready cash. She had a mania for having real money in her hands. When he came, ill-at-ease and fidgety, and left as if he had a load off his mind, I usually assumed he'd brought her cash."

Mr. Pinkerton glanced at the solicitor. He was looking steadily at Sellers. There was a little flush on his dark face, and the birthmark burned like a darkly crimson stain on his temple.

"So you didn't go with Mrs. Isom to the Pavilion?"

"No. I like to avoid scenes."

"You thought there'd be one?"

Sellers took a flat gold case out of his pocket, ex-

tracted a cigarette and lighted it. "We have a great many scenes here, Mr. Farquarson," he said coolly. "Ingratitude is a fairly common return on human investment."

He blew a thin blue plume of smoke into the heavy air.

"I then, as I said, went to the Pavilion later, because I'd realized I was being guilty of exactly that myself. I've told you the rest. I met Nurse Jessop. She had carried out Mrs. Isom's plans and had been dismissed until twelve."

Farquarson turned to the nurse.

"That would be fifty minutes or so from the time you'd left her?"

Nurse Jessop's manner was direct and candid.

"She told me to stay away for forty-five minutes, Mr. Farquarson. I met Mr. Sellers and told him that. We went up to look at the prints."

"Had you understood Mrs. Isom was meeting someone there?"

"Yes." Nurse Jessop smiled faintly. "And I'm afraid I was just curious enough to try to find out who it was."

"Did you?"

"I'm afraid not. I didn't see anybody there at all, except Miss Arnold, upstairs later, and Mr. Evill and Mr. Read downstairs. Of course, I didn't really spy—or not for long. Mr. Sellers was very severe with me about it."

Mr. Pinkerton saw that Colonel Isom, his head sunk forward on his chest, was listening with lively interest. Once when Nurse Jessop's eyes met his she smiled. The answering smile on his face was searching, and . . . Mr. Pinkerton groped for the word. A little meaningful, he decided. It was all very exciting, he thought, and most enjoyable. There were currents and cross-currents here, passion and jealousy and hatred. Was it some merely vulgar domestic intrigue, he

wondered, that had led to the old woman's violent death? And more important at present—were any of these people telling the truth?

"Did you have the idea that Mrs. Isom was looking forward to meeting this unknown person?"

"Oh dear, no. Quite the contrary. I understood exactly how Mr. Sellers felt about going along."

"Did you meet any of these people you've mentioned on the way to the Pavilion?"

"No. I saw them after I left Mrs. Isom. They must have seen her, of course, if they went through the rooms. I assume they *were* doing, or they wouldn't have been at the place. Though it does seem a bit surprising that everybody should decide on precisely the same moment to do a Cook's tour of the Pavilion."

She glanced at Mr. Marius Evill with a pleasant smile.

"As a matter of fact, I was interested in the prints upstairs and the two burnished gold dolphin stools in the Queen's Bedroom. I had a lot of time, you see. I strolled through the downstairs rooms, met Mr. Sellers just as he came into the Gallery, and we went up the stairs at the south end—in spite of the signs. It was just then that I happened to glance back and see Mr. Read going into the Music Room."

Mr. Pinkerton winced. Nurse Jessop did not so much as glance at Linda Farrell. Mr. Pinkerton did glance at her. She was looking attentively at the nurse. There was no sign on her young face that she was even vaguely concerned with what Andrew Read did or where he did it.

"Mr. Read admits going in there, Nurse Jessop," Miss Amelia Arnold snapped.

It was said so abruptly and harshly that Mr. Pinkerton jumped, and nearly slid off his horsehair sofa.

"He says," the Chief Constable remarked shortly, "that Mrs. Isom was dead when he went in."

"In that case," Mr. Quentin Sellers put in, "mightn't

it follow that some of the people who admit seeing Mrs. Isom alive, before Mr. Read saw her dead, might conceivably have a motive in not . . . being entirely frank?"

"You don't mean Nurse Jessop, by any chance?" Miss Arnold asked grimly.

"No," said Sellers. He turned toward her, suavely polite. "Didn't you yourself see her, before Read did?"

Amelia Arnold's tired face flushed.

"Afterwards, I believe, Mr. Sellers," she said frigidly.

Inspector Bull shifted his great bulk in his chair. There was an unusual tone in his voice when he spoke that made Mr. Pinkerton look at him hopefully. To anyone who knew Bull as well as he did it indicated that he had had an idea.

"Nurse Jessop went out of the Gallery door," he said. "Mr. Read entered, apparently, by the Gallery door. It's probable that quite a time elapsed between the two. Perhaps someone might have come into the room by the Drawing-room door, between those two times?"

He looked inquiringly about.

"Possible," Colonel Isom said. "Not probable."

His speech was even shorter and more nervous than before.

He met the glances turned on him with some irritation. "It seems plain enough—ha, ha! Mrs. Isom objected violently to Read. And does Read say the leather envelope was in her possession when he saw her?"

"He doesn't know," Farquarson answered. "He only saw her back. He didn't go inside. His story is that he changed his mind about speaking with her when he saw her sitting quietly, head forward."

Linda Farrell's grey eyes had travelled from one face to another as each spoke, getting darker, Mr. Pinkerton thought, as they moved round, the knuckles of her

hands about her knees getting whiter as she gripped them tightly.

"It's reasonable enough," Mr. Sellers said affably. "Mrs. Isom had forbidden him to come to the house, or any member of the household to see him or speak to him. With excellent reason from an adult point of view. Though I expect we all remember our own youth well enough to sympathize with Linda's resentment."

He smiled at the girl. She was not looking at him. She was quietly unravelling the dark green jumper that Miss Amelia Arnold had been knitting.

"I take it you did see him, Miss Farrell?"

She nodded.

"Why didn't Mrs. Isom like him?" Bull asked.

"Oh, he's a bounder of the worst sort," Sellers said. "He's in debt, he's been in one scrape after another. There was a girl in France and one in London. Mrs. Isom had no intention of getting her ward mixed up with a fortune-hunter."

Mr. Pinkerton squirmed uneasily. He for one did not believe it. Linda Farrell looked up with the first smile Mr. Pinkerton had seen on her face since the rainy morning, when she had run lightly down the Aquarium stairs to meet the young man who was now being so neatly ticked off, and then later had come out of the place while Mr. Pinkerton was fleeing from Miss Amelia Arnold. Mr. Pinkerton realized with a start of surprise that all that had happened only yesterday. It seemed, in some way, that he had known Linda Farrell and the woman whose jumper she was rapidly reducing to its lowest terms for a much longer time.

"You're all being perfectly beastly," Linda said calmly. "He's not the first man who's been in debt, or the first man that had to get out of Belgium to get away from a rich brewer's daughter. And 'fortune-hunter' is particularly good. He knows I've not got any money at all. He's had to lend me pennies for bus

fare twice. But the stupidest thing of all is that just because he thinks it's fun to meet me, and talk to me, you think he must have something else in mind. That's exactly what happened in Belgium. He spoke to the brewer's daughter twice and the brewer thought he ought to marry her."

She smiled brightly and shrugged her shoulders, with a brave attempt at indifference.

"Mrs. Isom hated him because he thought she was a stupid, arrogant, cruel old woman . . . and practically said so."

Mr. Pinkerton saw Amelia Arnold's hand close tightly on her slender wrist as she stood up.

"There is one important thing, though. That is, Mrs. Isom was *not* dead when Andy was in there."

Her upturned face gazing full into Inspector Bull's puzzled blue eyes was as transparent as the sky.

"And she still had that black leather envelope. If any of you really believe it had five thousand pounds in it. I know she had it, because I saw it! I saw her *after* Andy did. I . . . I would have killed her myself if I'd had anything to do it with. But you shan't, you shan't sit here and say Andy did it!"

Her smouldering eyes flashed. Then she smiled, quite as if none of it had really happened. "I'm *so* sorry! I'd forgotten we'd had scenes enough in this house!"

She went swiftly over to the door and opened it, and stood looking out into the hall an instant. "Mrs. Isom is dead," Mr. Pinkerton could hear her saying quietly to someone out there. "It really isn't necessary to listen at the door any longer."

Mr. Pinkerton, peering out past her, could see the swiftly disappearing form of the chauffeur-butler.

Linda looked after him for a moment, and turned back. "If you don't mind, I'll go to my room," she said calmly.

Miss Arnold looked uncertainly at the Chief Con-

stable for an instant, and went out after her. Farquarson turned to the London solicitor.

"Do I understand that Miss Farrell has no private means?"

Marius Evill shook his head.

"Nothing, except what Mrs. Isom cared to leave her. Linda's mother left what small means she had in Mrs. Isom's hands. Mrs. Isom had no children. The theory was that she would treat Linda as her own."

He hesitated, shook his head doubtfully, and went on as if against his better judgment. "In a sense she did do so. I doubt if she could have been more exacting, or more domineering, if the girl had been her own child."

"Where is the will, Mr. Evill?"

"It should be here at any time, sir. I have already sent for it. I . . . I'm afraid it won't meet the young lady's expectations—if she has expectations. Certainly not the young gentleman's."

Mr. Pinkerton, noticing the quietly searching gaze that both Colonel Isom and Mr. Quentin Sellers bent on the solicitor for an instant, wondered what they would get . . . and what their expectations were.

Nurse Jessop rose and smoothed down the fresh starched folds of her uniform.

"If there's nothing more I can help you gentlemen with, I think I'll rest a few moments," she said. She went over to Colonel Isom and put her cool efficient fingers on his wrist. She shook her head.

"You mustn't overdo it. This has been a much greater shock than you realize, so close to it."

Sellers smiled dryly. He turned his back to the room and crushed his cigarette out on the black polished grate.

Mr. Pinkerton was very puzzled indeed. Try as he would, he could not make out the relationships of these people. It was most confusing. The Chief Constable was confusing too. If Linda were to swear at the

inquest on the next day that she had seen her guardian after Andrew Read had gone in there, and that she was alive and in possession of the leather envelope at that time, no coroner's jury in England would be willing to say she was not telling the truth. Even now, of course, they could not detain Read for questioning, after that. But how could she . . . ? He trusted very much that someone would put his mind to establishing Miss Farrell's movements, as he had established his coming down with Inspector Bull on the Brighton Belle.

He looked at Farquarson. The Chief Constable was obviously, he thought, considering the same point.

Bull spoke. "It's not clear in my mind, Colonel Isom," he said placidly, "just where you were this morning? Just as a matter of routine record."

Colonel Isom nodded nervously.

"I've already told the Chief Constable. I was at the library, reading, as I always am, between 10.30 and 11.30. Invariable habit. Any of the young ladies there will tell you. After that I walked along the beach, stopped and ate a dish of cockles at a stall, and took the bus home."

"You were not at the Pavilion at any time, then, before twelve o'clock?"

Mr. Quentin Sellers was still facing the fireplace, but it seemed to Mr. Pinkerton, from his sudden tensed posture, that he was watching Colonel Isom with extraordinary and carefully concealed interest.

Isom shook his head.

"It seems incredible to me that I should have been so close to where she was meeting such an end," he said jerkily, "and not have known about it. Ha, ha, ha! But I assure you it didn't occur to me she was in the place. No more than I'd have thought she was in Harry's Oyster Dive. Incomprehensible. Wouldn't have said she knew there *was* a Pavilion."

"Do you know anyone, Colonel Isom, who might have been blackmailing your wife?" Bull asked.

The tall angular man stared. "Nonsense, poppy-cock!" he said.

"Do you recognize anyone here in this room that you have seen recently, in other circumstances?"

Colonel Isom looked at him, and at the Chief Constable. He looked blankly at Evill and Sellers. Mr. Pinkerton tried to stay on the slippery and spiny surface of the horsehair seat.

Colonel Isom at last stared intently at the grey little man for a moment.

"Ah," he said, "to be sure. Seen him. Don't know where. Isn't this the chap that keeps a shop in the Lanes?"

Bull looked soberly at him. "It's unimportant," he said. "Will you wait for us below, Pinkerton?"

CHAPTER XIV

MR. PINKERTON got hastily to his feet. He was still more bewildered. Inspector Bull had never before deliberately put him out of an investigation.

In the hall he adjusted his lozenge-shaped spectacles and tried to think of an explanation for such inexplicable conduct that was not completely crushing to his small grey ego. But he could find none. Obviously the word of a lieutenant-colonel of His Majesty's Indian Forces was worth more than that of one of the least of His Majesty's Welsh subjects. Nevertheless . . .

Half way down the stairs he stopped abruptly. A sharp urgent little sound above him on the landing caught his attention. He looked up. Linda Farrell was leaning over the banister, beckoning him to wait. She ran noiselessly down to him, pulled him after her to the end of the hall, opened the door into a large and luxurious if baroque library, pushed him in and closed the door behind them.

She looked entreatingly into Mr. Pinkerton's astonished face.

"You don't think he's so beastly, do you?" she whispered.

Mr. Pinkerton felt her eager urgent fingers on his arm. His blood quickened, warm and tingling.

"I mean, he's not a bounder, and he's not just . . . I mean, that business about the Belgian girl . . ."

Mr. Pinkerton blinked. Obviously the murder of her guardian was a small offence to Linda Farrell compared with the others that Andrew Read had been charged with. However, Mr. Pinkerton could understand that perfectly too.

"I really . . . no, no, I don't think so at all!" he stammered.

"Oh, I knew you'd make sense, the minute I saw you!"

Her eyes shone through two large blinding tears.

"I was watching you in there. I saw you didn't believe any of it. Listen—you *will* see him, won't you? And tell him what I said to them . . . that I talked with her *after* he left. Will you tell him that? And tell him I . . . I'm really all right here. Will you . . . *please*?"

Before Mr. Pinkerton could say a word the urgent hand closed tightly on his arm.

"Oh, how awful! Oh, quick, please—behind there, quick!"

Mr. Pinkerton heard the steps near the door then, and made a leap across the room, his heart beating quite wildly. He heard the door open just as he disappeared—or hoped to high Heaven he had disappeared—behind a large iron-black velvet sofa at right angles to the elaborate Italian fireplace. The door closed softly. Mr. Pinkerton cowered there, waiting, his heart in his mouth.

"Linda!"

He recognized the voice instantly, with breathless excitement.

"My dear! Please . . . *please* don't let this infatuation blind you to everything you've been brought up to think and feel! Because it *is* an infatuation. You must believe me, Linda! You're so young, my dear! You know nothing about this fellow . . . except that even his own family have chucked him out. You've had no experience, Linda. You can't go on with this—I can't let you!"

Mr. Pinkerton heard the girl's quick breathing and the sound of a chair being pushed back against a table.

"Oh dear!" he thought miserably. He had a ghastly picture of himself scrambling dutifully out from behind the sofa, saying in tones that he hoped would sound

more confident than they would be, "Unhand her, sir," or something of the sort. He listened wretchedly.

"Have you forgotten everything, Linda? Last spring in Normandy . . . that day at Devil's Dyke?"

Mr. Pinkerton blinked, and drew a deep careful breath of relief. This was not what he had feared. This was like the cinema. He could see it quite clearly. Normandy Spring Song. Passion at Devil's Dyke. He knew the kind very well. The pleading convincing earnestness that blasts while it deceives. He listened with shocked anxious ears.

"It's you that's forgotten," Linda Farrell said coolly. "It's you that's not been the same. Not since she came."

Mr. Pinkerton's heart almost stood still. He thought of Andrew Read tossing feverishly on his prison bed, if that was where the Chief Constable had got him stowed away.

The man's gently chiding voice was maddening.

"You sweet, silly child!" it said. "So that's what's been the matter. Linda . . . it's not worthy of you, my dear. We'll send her away—to-morrow."

"Will you?"

Her voice was suddenly eager, almost pleading.

"To-night . . . Linda!"

Mr. Pinkerton moistened his lips. He could not bear another word. He had seen too many pictures, such as *Satan's Caress*, and *The Scarlet Gardenia*, to have any illusions as to the scene that was bound to follow that tone in a man's voice. He peered desperately about. Hanging at the side of the hearth, only a foot from his hand, was a wide embroidered bell-pull. Suddenly, almost before he entirely recognized the possible consequences, he gave it a tug.

"To-night, my dear. We'll send her packing. Now say you'll forget all this mad nonsense . . . and we'll be married . . . to-morrow, Linda!"

The voice became playful again.

"After all, it isn't quite the thing for a bachelor and

a widower and two spinsters to live under the same roof . . . is it?"

Mr. Pinkerton listened with a heart already sunk beyond hope of salvage for some protest, some denial of that monstrous suggestion from Linda's lips. But none came. Only a sound at the door. Then he heard the chauffeur-butler's silky voice.

"Did you ring, sir?"

There was a needle-sharp point of silence. Then Quentin Sellers's biting voice.

"As Miss Linda has said once this evening, your mistress is dead, Noakes. There's really no further need for you to listen at keyholes."

"I beg pardon, sir—the bell rang."

There was no change of tone in the man's voice.

Mr. Pinkerton adjusted his spectacles nervously, hoping, with cold despair, that Inspector Bull was still somewhere in the house, to prevent him from being utterly destroyed when they pulled him out by the scruff of the neck.

Then he heard Linda's soft slightly husky voice saying, "It was I who rang. Will you bring some sherry, and whisky-and-soda, to the drawing-room, please? Let's go in there, shall we?"

"Jolly good idea," Sellers said, a little shortly. He added in a low tone, "Is this what you've learned from the American?"

Linda's soft laugh curdled what remained of the grey little man's frozen blood.

Noakes coughed. "I beg pardon—the Chief Constable was inquiring for the other person who came in with them?"

The girl spoke quickly. "I expect he'll turn up. We shan't worry about him. Miss Arnold still thinks he's your detective, Quentin, by the way."

Sellers laughed. "*My* detective, my dear? Your late esteemed guardian's detective."

Mr. Pinkerton heard the door close. He waited a

century in two moments, crept out from behind the sofa and opened the door with great care. The hall was empty. He waited. There was no sound. Then, in practically no time at all, he was down the thickly carpeted stairs, the dread that assailed his heart lending wings to his feet.

The most ghastly thing, of course, was that he had not the remotest idea whether Linda Farrell was a poor innocent, beset by scheming, deceitful and very suave villains, or a scheming, deceitful and very suave villainess, out to avenge the Belgian brewer's daughter by hanging Andrew Read by the heart until it was broken and by the neck until he was dead. He had not much faith in women. None had ever deceived him personally, it was true, but he was acquainted with the large body of historical data on the subject.

He crept along the hall, put his hand cautiously on the outside door, and stopped dead. A firm cool voice at the end of the hall behind him brought him to an abrupt and awful halt.

He peered, terrified, over his shoulder. Nurse Jessop, dressed for the street in a modish dark frock and small close-fitting hat dark against the dazzling yellow of her smartly waved hair, came swiftly toward him, with a bright smile.

"Are you going into town?" she said briskly. "Perhaps we might go together."

Mr. Pinkerton stood paralysed, his hand still on the door knob, trying desperately not to look as much like a scared rabbit as he felt.

"I've wanted to talk to you anyway," Nurse Jessop said. Her smile was frank and confident, and her direct gaze met Mr. Pinkerton's squarely. "You see, you've got . . . you've got such an *understanding* face."

Mr. Pinkerton nodded mutely, wretchedly. As they came out of the doorway he glanced unhappily to the right and left. But the Chief Constable's car was gone. Bull had obviously abandoned him to his own folly.

Nurse Jessop took his arm lightly as they stepped from the porch into the street. In front of them was the green enclosed square, to the left the terrace, and beyond it, as far as the eye could see, the deep calm blue of the ocean. Nurse Jessop smiled shyly at the perturbed little man.

"I'm afraid you think I'm very brazen, Mr. Pinkerton."

Mr. Pinkerton found his voice with an effort. "Oh no, no! No indeed!" he stammered hastily.

"It's sweet of you to say that. I know you really must think I'm terrible. Oh yes you do!"

She squeezed his arm playfully with her white-gloved fingers. Mr. Pinkerton shivered internally.

"I saw you did—this morning in front of the Pavilion, when I was taking poor dear Mrs. Isom one way when she was insisting on going the other. Now didn't you?"

Perturbed as he was, Mr. Pinkerton yet pricked up his mental ears. He even ventured a sideways glance.

"I . . . I did see you," he stammered apologetically.

A warning thought came suddenly to him. Perhaps—just as in the case of Inspector Bull, in a slightly different way, of course—this young woman thought, simply because perhaps he looked a trifle odd, that he was an utter ass. Mr. Pinkerton, thinking how that had often worked out in Bull's case, felt his chilled heart glow.

"You're very sweet!" Nurse Jessop said gratefully. "But you did think I was a dreadfully naughty person . . . didn't you?"

Mr. Pinkerton ventured a second glance. Her face was open, direct and forthright. There was no slightest hint on it of scheming or deceit.

"And you'd run away now, if I'd let you—wouldn't you? But I won't!"

Mr. Pinkerton shook his head, dumbly and falsely. They were just turning where Sussex Square becomes Lewes Crescent. Mr. Pinkerton, for no real reason that he was conscious of, now that escape was out of the question, looked back.

Linda Farrell had come out on to the balcony that extended along in front of the long windows of the drawing-room, and was standing there, watching him, arm-in-arm with the woman she hated and feared. Even from where he was, Mr. Pinkerton could see the hurt stricken look on her face—so tragically pathetic that he stopped appalled.

Nurse Jessop glanced at him quickly. She looked back, smiled and waved her hand.

“Good-bye, Linda!” she called.

Without any effort that could have been apparent to the girl on the balcony she led Mr. Pinkerton round the corner and out of sight.

“Linda’s a sweet girl,” she said. “She’s been awfully brought up. All those old people spoiling her. Always giving in to her slightest whim. I told Mrs. Isom I didn’t see how she could suddenly be so worried and upset at her wilfulness, after letting her run absolutely wild all her life.”

She turned a serious intelligent gaze to Mr. Pinkerton.

“You see, I don’t believe young people are really bad. I really mean that. I don’t think Linda is, particularly. She’s just a thoughtless spoiled child.”

They had come to the end of the curving walk of Arundel Terrace, and stepped into the road. At their left the deserted brown meadows ended abruptly at the white chalk cliffs going sheerly down to the concrete underwalk along the sea. To their right, along King’s Cliff Road, cars and buses and people swept down into Brighton. Opposite them, toward the broad ocean, was the bright roof and gaily striped awnings and umbrellas of Black Rock Pool.

Then a thing happened that to Mr. Pinkerton’s mind was very awful.

“What would you say,” Nurse Jessop said suddenly, “if I asked you to take me over there for a bite of supper? Would you be horribly shocked?”

CHAPTER XV

FORTUNATELY for Nurse Jessop's self-possession, she had not the faintest idea of just how horribly shocked Mr. Pinkerton was. It was the first time in his life that any woman had made such a proposition to him . . . or any human being, or for that matter any being of any kind, human or inhuman. It . . . it just had never been done. He felt surreptitiously, with trembling fingers, in his pocket. He had no remote notion of how much it would cost him, or whether he had that much money with him . . . barring his emergency five-pound note, which was sewed into the lining of his waistcoat and which he certainly would never touch. Also, and much more important, it was exactly this sort of thing that was virtually certain to bring Mrs. Pinkerton's restless unhappy spirit flying back from the tomb. She had always regarded Brighton in general—though she knew nothing about it—as a sink-hole of iniquity, all gay brightly coloured places as trappings of evil, all smartly dressed blonde women as pawns of Satan.

"You see," Nurse Jessop went on, with a cheerful ignorance of those deadly facts, "I want so much to talk to you . . . about all this."

Mr. Pinkerton found himself moving, dazed and unhappy, and yet a little thrilled at his own daring, across the road, past the police box in the shelter, down the stairs, across the motor road to the terrace. Just below them people were splashing, shouting, and laughing in the sparkling blue oblong of the pool. It was warm and pleasant, sitting there, under the orange and green umbrellas. He had to admit it.

He glanced timidly at the young woman sitting opposite him. But she had completely and competently taken charge of everything.

"I'm going to order for you . . . because I'm a hospital nurse, and I know precisely what's good for you. A glass of dry sherry, please."

"Sorry, miss," the waitress said civilly. "If you want anything to drink you'll have to go on the other side." She pointed across the terrace.

"This side isn't licensed. The other is."

"But how ridiculous!"

"I know, miss. But that's the way it is."

"It doesn't matter, really," Mr. Pinkerton said hastily—more hastily than he would have said it if he had not at that moment seen the large cinnamon-brown form of his closest friend and former lodger, together with the Chief Constable of South Sussex, come out and sit at a table across the terrace, on the licensed side. A waitress over there was just putting two tall cool glasses of beer on the table in front of them.

Mr. Pinkerton edged his chair to the left, so that Nurse Jessop and some people providentially at the next table cut off his view of them . . . together, he profoundly hoped, with their view of him. If Bull should see him dining there with this woman . . . The cold sweat broke out all over him. He ran two fingers round the inside edge of his celluloid collar.

"And I don't think Mrs. Isom was wise in the means she used to keep Linda away from this young American chap. He seems very nice to me. I know you can't always tell. And I expect a large sum of money is a pretty strong temptation for any penniless young man."

Mr. Pinkerton ventured a question.

"Do you really think he knew she had that money with her?"

Nurse Jessop smiled.

"I don't think Mr. Sellers was being frank when he said he didn't know who Mrs. Isom was expecting to meet at the Pavilion this morning. But then you saw through him. I was watching you. You *are* a clever one!"

She wagged one pink-enamelled finger at the little man.

"Old fox!" she murmured.

Mr. Pinkerton winced. Furthermore, it seemed that every one had been watching him.

"You don't think he's . . . blackmailing her, or anything like that? I mean, why all that money . . . ?" he asked breathlessly.

Nurse Jessop was immediately serious.

"I don't know, Mr. Pinkerton. I don't want to think about it, even. I think it's simpler to say she had the money, and she didn't care to leave it at home. We have some rather curious ethical points of view in our house. But then, you've sensed that already. I saw that, too."

Ordinarily Mr. Pinkerton's grey little ego was likely to become intoxicated on very small beer indeed. Now everything was additionally conducive to it, under the bright-striped umbrella there on the terrace above the pool: an attractive young woman opposite him in the lovely late summer twilight, the excellent fillet of plaice that had been followed by equally good boiled chicken and white sauce and was now about to be followed by the tinned fruit salad. Furthermore, Mr. Pinkerton rather fancied himself as an observer of human character, and he had indeed noticed the fact that there were curious points of view in the Isom house. Everything indicated, really, although he was somewhat loath to admit it, that Nurse Jessop was a young woman of extraordinary sense.

Mr. Pinkerton would not have been the first lonesome middle-aged man to be deluded by a blonde young woman whose foot accidentally touched his now and then under the table in a summer evening on a bathing pool terrace. But there were three things that kept him from falling over the not very high cliff of his self-love. One was the burly stolid figure plainly visible, if Mr. Pinkerton should crane his neck—which he had no

idea of doing—on the licensed side of the terrace. A second was the stricken look on Linda Farrell's pale face as she stood on the balcony. And a third was Mr. Pinkerton's observation that not the least curious of the ethical points of view in the Isom home was Nurse Jessop's.

Nurse Jessop looked away over the deep misty blue of the evening sea.

"I think if he did take the envelope, and if it did have money in it, it's more than likely that it was accidental."

A shadow crossed her brown eyes.

"Of course it's true, though I don't see it's as important as Colonel Isom seems to think, that this young man did know Mrs. Isom sometimes had large sums of money with her."

Mr. Pinkerton's heart chilled. It obviously was most important.

"How do you know that?" he asked timidly.

"Because when she bought this new car, round the middle of July, she paid for it in cash. Mr. Read was at the house. He came with Barrett Wiggs. That's when he met Linda. It was a little awkward for Barrett Wiggs. Mrs. Isom had a violent antipathy for anything American. Well, she was a staunch Edwardian, of course, and she felt all Americans are adventurers, and all that."

Mr. Pinkerton shook his head involuntarily. Not that he approved of many things that went on, but the only American he had ever known had been rather a fine chap, and actually refused to marry a girl with a lot of money, and did marry her when it turned out she'd not been left a penny.

Nurse Jessop sensed his disapproval instantly.

"Anyway, that's what *she* thought about it. She almost refused to take the car. She told him exactly what she thought about all Americans. Mr. Read didn't help matters by telling her she was an arrogant,

insular old ostrich. With a pleasant smile, of course . . . which made it worse."

Mr. Pinkerton's eyes bulged. However, it sounded most like him.

"It was very difficult. I don't think she'd have been so utterly livid as she was except that when he was calling her an old ostrich she caught him grinning at Linda too . . . and Linda was actually encouraging him."

Mr. Pinkerton shook his head politely, but his heart was not in it.

"And then what really did infuriate her beyond measure was that when she'd ordered Linda to her room, he calmly told her he'd made up his mind to marry the girl. The mad idiot had never laid eyes on the child till that moment. Mrs. Isom said he'd do it over her dead body. . . . Well, she was in such a rage she had a stroke two days later . . . her second."

"Oh dear!" Mr. Pinkerton exclaimed aghast. He swallowed whole the large pink cherry he had been carefully saving for the last succulent bite.

Nurse Jessop shrugged. "After that Mrs. Isom forbade Linda to leave the house, and of course she began sneaking out, meeting him in odd places. Mrs. Isom was blind. After all, she'd brought the girl up. That's the thanks she got."

Mr. Pinkerton nodded. "It's . . . indecent," he said firmly.

"And everybody else in the house has tried to co-operate with Mrs. Isom."

Mr. Pinkerton recalled his unfortunate adventure in the Aquarium. He wondered. "Including Miss Arnold?" he asked.

Nurse Jessop gave him a sudden smile so bright with admiration that his heart expanded in spite of the close presence of the big man just across the terrace, now having, so far as Mr. Pinkerton had been able to count, at least his fourth glass of beer. Mr. Pinkerton himself

was not a drinking man except on the rarest occasions, the late Mrs. Pinkerton having been a fanatical teetotaler. He rather wished now, however, that they were on the licensed side too.

Nurse Jessop put down her coffee. "I said you were sly," she remarked calmly. "Not much gets by you!"

She leaned toward him confidentially.

"Between ourselves, Mr. Pinkerton—and if I didn't know I could trust you as I could my own brother I shouldn't breathe a word of this to you. . . ."

She glanced over her shoulder and leaned closer. Mr. Pinkerton, pleased in spite of everything that she had not said "father," could feel her soft breath against his cheek. He felt a warm stir of excitement, and moved back slightly, a little ashamed of himself as well as pleased.

"Mrs. Isom had found out, Heaven knows how or where, that Amelia Arnold was aiding those impudent young scoundrels—notes and phone calls and so on. She even pretended Linda was taking an interest in housekeeping, and took her shopping so she could see him while Arnold really did shop."

Mr. Pinkerton's grey little heart glowed warmly. At the same time he almost giggled at the thought of the dreadful mistake the nurse was making. But how, of course, could Miss Jessop have guessed that she was saying utterly the wrong thing, and that the timid little rabbit of a man sitting opposite her felt about this precisely as Amelia Arnold did? Murder was a mild and forgivable sin, as opposed to the great and overwhelming virtue of giving aid and comfort to young forbidden love.

"There's no doubt Mrs. Isom was going to throw Arnold out," Nurse Jessop went on seriously. "And I *do* feel so sorry for her. After all, I'm an unmarried woman too, and I know it's a lonely business."

She smiled mischievously and waited. Mr. Pinkerton dimly realized that it was his cue to say something in

keeping with the summer twilight, and the gay pool, and the dark blue of the sea just beyond it. But his throat did not seem to work. Nurse Jessop, however, after a decent interval, said it for him.

"I have a lot of men friends, of course, and she—poor dear—has none at all. Mrs. Isom was marvellous to her. Arnold had taken care of her invalid father for years and years. What little he had was in an annuity that lapsed when he died. She was left, almost forty, with ten pounds a year or so, and, of course, not fitted to do anything. Mrs. Isom took her in. She's been here fifteen years. Mrs. Isom bought her clothes and gave her pocket-money."

Nurse Jessop smiled charmingly again. "I wish somebody would be as good to poor little me!"

Mr. Pinkerton blinked. A second opportunity to be the gallant and sophisticated man of the world slipped by for ever.

"Of course, she and Linda have never been friends, not until this thing happened."

Mr. Pinkerton understood that perfectly.

"And she never got on with Colonel Isom or Mr. Sellers."

Mr. Pinkerton understood that too.

"I know Colonel Isom has often said he was sure Mrs. Isom only kept her snivelling and creeping about just to annoy him, because he detested her so."

"And . . . Mr. Sellers?"

"Oh, he's a charming person. I think it's too marvellous the way he's stuck to that family through thick and thin."

"Really," said Mr. Pinkerton. He tried hard, but he was not entirely able to keep a faint shade of incredulity from his voice.

Nurse Jessop gave him a quick friendly glance.

"Oh yes. You see, Colonel Isom's extremely odd at times. Mrs. Isom often told me she could never have put up with him unless Mr. Sellers had been there.

He's horribly neurotic, you know, and he gets morose and sullen, and says the awfulest things. Then he drinks, of course. You saw that. No; you weren't there. But he does. Oh, it's really terrible."

She shook her head.

"Mr. Sellers has sort of stood by. He's a lot younger than Mrs. Isom, but she said, and I can really believe it, that he was in love with her once. She was extremely handsome as a middle-aged woman. He came to them after the war, just been through it. She took care of him like a mother, and after that he stayed on . . . like a son."

Mr. Pinkerton coloured faintly, at the mere idea of its being necessary to say that.

"Didn't Colonel Isom and his wife get on?" he inquired.

"Like cat and dog. But she had the money, and precious little she doled out to him, I'll tell you. I don't suppose you can understand a situation of the sort."

Mr. Pinkerton shook his head. Heaven knew no one could understand it better, he thought; but he did not care to say that to Nurse Jessop.

"So now you can understand that *my* position hasn't been very simple," she went on calmly. "Take just that business of this morning, that you saw yourself. Mrs. Isom wanting to go to the Pavilion, but not wanting anybody else to know she did . . . so that I had to wheel her off there, just as if she really wanted to go somewhere else and I was taking her there against her will!"

Mr. Pinkerton nodded his complete understanding. Not being quite as incompetent, mentally, as the young lady no doubt thought he was, he had been expecting that for some time. His heart warmed a bit.

She looked at the jewelled watch on her wrist suddenly with a startled exclamation.

"Oh, dear me, look at the time! You ought to be

ashamed of yourself, simply making me forget I'm a working girl! I should have been back twenty minutes ago!"

She powdered her nose, retouched her red lips and put on her gloves.

Mr. Pinkerton, who had been trying to think, rapidly, who of the inhabitants of the big house in Sussex Square Nurse Jessop had not managed to incriminate, or rather to cast suspicion on, while they had been there together at Black Rock Pool, was none the less vaguely troubled. After all, perhaps she had had a hard time. And she was certainly a very attractive young woman . . . in her way. He was a little worried, as a very kind-hearted man. She was going back, apparently not knowing at all that she was returning to get sacked. He hoped she would not mind very much. And yet. . . .

"If Miss Linda should decide to marry Mr. Sellers, what would happen to Miss Arnold then?" he asked boldly, to his great surprise.

Nurse Jessop stopped with one glove half on, and looked at him.

"Linda marry Mr. Sellers?" she asked. There was a little edge of sharpness to her pleasant voice.

Mr. Pinkerton blinked. "Oh dear!" he stammered. "Have I . . . let the cat out of the bag?"

Nurse Jessop laughed, and finished putting on her glove.

"My dear man, that cat was never in the bag. Wherever did you get such an absurd idea?"

Mr. Pinkerton, foolishly, was annoyed. He spoke, consequently, before he had at all figured out what he was saying or whether it was wise to say it. "I heard him ask her," he said.

"You did?" Nurse Jessop asked. She looked at him rather queerly. "He didn't, by any chance, say *I* was getting the sack, did he?" she asked slowly.

Mr. Pinkerton stammered dreadfully. "I . . . I'm afraid he did," he replied miserably.

Nurse Jessop laughed a long, ringing, delighted peal.

"My dear lamb, it'll take more than Quentin Sellers to sack me."

She patted her tight yellow curls into place.

"I'm afraid I'm going to be at the Isoms' for some time . . . even after Mr. Sellers goes—if I choose—of course, I'm not sure I do choose."

She shrugged her shoulders and smiled—a rather hard, brittle smile, Mr. Pinkerton thought uneasily.

"After all, I'm a comparatively young woman. I've got my future to think of."

She laughed again suddenly.

"And my future, Mr. Pinkerton, is in Brighton . . . not out here. Neatly tucked away somewhere."

She smiled and touched him lightly on the shoulder.

"Good night . . . and thanks so much for dinner! It was awfully sweet of you to ask me. No . . . you mustn't come back with me."

Mr. Pinkerton, who had made no move to that end, pushed back his chair hastily.

"No, really—I'm serious. It wouldn't look well, would it. Good night!"

Mr. Pinkerton sat down again. The waitress brought him his bill.

"The large gentleman with the moustache says if you aren't too busy with the ladies, sir, maybe you'll drop in at the police station some time this evening."

Mr. Pinkerton looked up at her aghast. She was favouring him with a toothy grin.

"Oh . . . yes, of course," he said, with what dignity he could muster.

"Oh dear, dear!" he thought miserably. "Whatever *will* he think of me?"

CHAPTER XVI

MR. PINKERTON scurried across the road, narrowly escaping a bus that was shooting down the undercliff road, and ran up the stairs where he and Nurse Jessop had come down. The great stone houses of Arundel Terrace loomed before him on the opposite side. A car turned into the drive and disappeared into Sussex Square.

A man standing at the kerb said to the old woman with him, "Cor, I remember when I was a lad no common mortal would 'a' thought a' steppin' foot inside that gyte, it was that 'oly—wot with footmen an' lackeys an' jukes. Syme as royalty, they was. Now look at 'em, murderin' heach other like they was Bermondsey."

Mr. Pinkerton moved away. He would have moved away more quickly if he had recognized the dark figure hurrying down the centre of the terrace drive. As it was, he stood there innocently, watching the white-helmeted policeman, wondering so intently where it was on his large genial person that he kept his pocket receiving set that he was quite unaware of Miss Amelia Arnold. She had come to the entrance of the drive and was looking anxiously up and down the road. Nor did Mr. Pinkerton see that when she spotted his meagre grey figure she took a long deep breath, glanced hastily behind her, and came hurriedly across the road.

Mr. Pinkerton saw her when she was half way over. He searched the long empty road frantically for a bus. But none was in sight. He would even have taken a taxi to escape, but there was no taxi in sight either. There was nothing for it but to look anxiously at his watch as if he was in a dreadful hurry, and pretend he'd

not seen her. There was no telling when Miss Amelia Arnold would decide to get the police after him again, and there was one of them uncomfortably close at hand.

Then Mr. Pinkerton noticed, out of the tail of his eye, that she was not advancing with the brazen confidence of Nurse Jessop. She was definitely uncertain. In fact her whole manner was so tentative, timid and apologetic that Mr. Pinkerton, himself a most tentative and timid person, felt a sudden sympathy with the lonely friendless woman coming haltingly toward him in the dusk. The thought of the way Linda Farrell had flown to her after her sudden outburst over the curtains, and what Nurse Jessop had said about the way she had aided and abetted Linda and Andrew Read, came back to him.

He smiled shyly. "Good evening, Miss Arnold," he said, somewhat to his surprise.

Miss Arnold gave a sigh of relief. "Oh, dear!" she said. "I wasn't sure you'd remember me."

"I'm not likely," Mr. Pinkerton found himself replying, to his still greater surprise, "to forget a charming lady who threatens to have me arrested in front of an octopus tank."

He realized with a little shock of consternation that he was saying quite naturally to this woman the sort of thing that had stuck miserably in his throat under Nurse Jessop's bright encouraging glances. It occurred to him also that she was not as unattractive as he had thought, really. The circumstances were not favourable, for one thing, he realized. She was . . . he groped in his mind for a word, and failed to find it. But like the quiet evening, somehow. Not the garish midday of Nurse Jessop.

"I know you'll never forgive me," Miss Arnold said. "It *was* stupid. I . . . I do hope you weren't very annoyed?"

"Oh, not at all," Mr. Pinkerton said. "Very flattered, really!"

Her blue eyes brightened with pleasure. Mr.

Pinkerton saw that they must have been rather fine when she was young. They were distinctly her best feature.

He listened to himself in an astonished and admiring daze.

"You're very kind," Miss Arnold said. She looked away for an instant, hesitating, and went rapidly on. "I wonder if you'll be still kinder. I know I'm imposing on you dreadfully, but . . . if you wouldn't mind . . . I'd like to talk to you for a few moments."

She looked at him anxiously. "But I know you're in a great hurry."

"Not at all," Mr. Pinkerton said promptly.

He realized with an intuition born of years of being tentative and repressed that he was seeing a side of Amelia Arnold that the tall gaunt woman kept concealed, in pure self-defence, from hard confident assertive people like Jessop, and Quentin Sellers, and the late Marie Louise Isom. Linda had seen the quality of gentleness and understanding in her, and the strength too. Mr. Pinkerton could see it now. He thought suddenly how absurd it was of him to have thought she looked like the late Mrs. Pinkerton.

"Perhaps, if you wouldn't mind, we might walk along the cliff?" she was saying, almost timidly.

"Yes indeed," Mr. Pinkerton answered quickly. "Let's, shall we?"

At the end of the street where they crossed the under-cliff road he took her arm and piloted her to the other side. He was not even aware that he had done it, for in a curious way Amelia Arnold made him quite suddenly unconscious of himself, for the first time for many years.

They stepped on to the hard dry turf that stretches between the road and the sheer precipitous drop of the chalk cliffs down to the walk along the sea wall. Miss Arnold pointed to the wire barrier at the edge of the grass.

"They call this Suicide Corner," she said. "Somebody went over this morning. One week this summer five people jumped off. It's a sure way out—especially since they've built the concrete sea wall underneath."

She shivered. Mr. Pinkerton shook his head soberly. He noticed that she was not really very much taller than himself, and that her voice as a matter of fact was rather pleasantly soft, for an Englishwoman's.

"I'm dreadfully frightened," she said suddenly.

It seemed natural to Mr. Pinkerton that she should say that, and that he should reply "What of?" in a matter-of-fact tone—in spite of the fact that he knew very well.

They strolled along the turf between the cliff and the road. Ahead, Mr. Pinkerton could still see the great cliff, dazzling white, he knew, when the sun was on it, sweeping out into the water, turning sharply back, sweeping out again in giant curves, as far as the eye could see.

"I don't know," Amelia Arnold said. "The future, probably. You know, Mr. Pinkerton, I've always lived with somebody very difficult. First it was my father. He was paralytic and almost blind for as far back as I can remember, almost. Then Mrs. Isom, and now she's gone. It's . . . bewildering."

Mr. Pinkerton could barely see her face in the fading light. She looked round at him, smiling.

"I didn't really come out to talk about myself. I expect it's because there's something . . . well, sympathetic, about you. You've not always been very happy yourself, have you?"

"No," Mr. Pinkerton replied simply. "Not at all until the last few years. I've been able to do as I like, lately. Maybe you can do as you like now."

"One gets out of the habit of having likes and dislikes about oneself," Amelia Arnold said, with a faint smile. "Although perhaps just not having to do what someone else likes is enough in itself."

Mr. Pinkerton nodded. After all, now that he thought about it, that was the large part of his own freedom.

"It's not that that disturbs me, however," she went on.

They had sat down on a bench at the cliff's edge, and were looking out into the luminous emptiness of sky and sea.

"It's Linda."

She hesitated, pleating the shabby black lace shawl that she had slipped from her head with nervous fingers. The evening light softened the tired lines of her face. Her smile, as she glanced at the little Welshman on the bench beside her, was shy and uncertain.

"You see, I'm to blame for some of this. I . . . well, you see, I . . . encouraged her romance with Andrew Read."

"I know," Mr. Pinkerton said. "Why . . . why did you?"

He had been wondering about that.

"Wouldn't you have done? Perhaps not. You're not a stupid silly old woman whose one romance with a village curate ended because there wasn't enough money for her sick father and his very healthy mother. I suppose that's why I couldn't resist that cheerful young rascal from the day he took my shopping basket from me—I needn't say he'd seen Linda first—and spent the morning showing me how to buy potatoes and cabbages, and talking about her. You felt a thousand sick parents wouldn't make any difference to him, if he wanted a girl."

She laughed. "I couldn't resist him. I took Linda shopping with me every day after that. They used to potter about the Lanes at first, buying things for his mother . . . who, according to him, won't have anything that's not old, cracked, chipped or completely broken in the house."

"I . . . I think that was splendid of you," Mr. Pinkerton said, and he really did.

"Yes, I know."

There was a touch of bitterness in her quiet voice.

"Except that now there's all this business about the money and Mrs. Isom."

"Oh well," said Mr. Pinkerton hastily, "I'm sure Andrew Read hadn't any connection with any of that."

She shook her head. "There's still all the business about his family chucking him out, and those other girls. . . . It's quite true that the Belgian brewer was over here, early this month, hunting for him."

"With a . . ." Mr. Pinkerton realized with a gasp that he had nearly asked, "With a shotgun?" before he thought what a dreadful thing it would have been to say. In any case, Miss Arnold would not have understood it.

"With a cheque book, and a large dowry," she said. "I know; because, you see—and I'm afraid you'll find this pretty shocking—I pretended I was his aunt, and that my brother, who'd be his father of course, was penniless. That was Andy's idea. But that didn't bother the brewer. So then we had to break down, both of us, and confess he was already secretly married. That was my idea. It was drastic, but it worked. Then, ever since, I've been terrified for fear the Isoms would find out and convince Linda he really was secretly married."

Miss Arnold laughed a little. "It was very exciting. Do you think it was unwomanly?"

"Oh, no!" Mr. Pinkerton said hastily. "I . . . it was very fine of you!"

He really meant that too.

"Well," she went on slowly, "now what if he's turned out not to be what I thought he was? Goodness knows I've no experience with young men. What if he is just a philanderer whose family really are through with him, and I've got Linda into a terrible mess? What should I do?"

She looked helplessly at him.

"Because, you see, I wasn't *entirely* putty in his hands—even if both he and Linda thought so. If I had been, I might have found some excuse for myself, no matter how lame. But I wasn't. I mean, I thought of many ways of getting them together that he didn't. Because . . ."

Miss Arnold hesitated for a long time.

"You see, Linda has never been allowed a moment of her own, or a friend, girl or boy, who wasn't just put down in that dark, airless room for a moment, with the whole family present, and then packed off again immediately. She hadn't a chance for any life of her own, with people her own age."

Mr. Pinkerton blinked in surprise. This was very different from Nurse Jessop's account of her running wild, untrammelled and spoiled all her life.

"No," Miss Arnold said bitterly, "she was being smothered. I knew that if something didn't happen to take her out of that house, with its horrible drawn curtains and that old dragon of a guardian, why, she'd end chained to Mrs. Isom's bedside, or worse still, married to Quentin Sellers. I think that's what terrified me the most for her."

"You don't like Mr. Sellers?"

"I think people ought to marry people somewhere near their own age," Amelia Arnold said practically. "And I don't think people ought to take other people's lives in their hands and shape them in their own image. I'm not sure just when Marie Isom decided Linda should marry Sellers. But it was after Andrew appeared. On the spur of the moment. It must have been."

Mr. Pinkerton shook his head. "Spite?"

"I expect so."

They sat silent for a moment, watching the yellow lights of a Channel boat disappear, twinkling far off into the night.

"Why did you think I was a detective?" Mr. Pinkerton asked.

"I'm sorry!" Amelia Arnold said humbly. "You must have thought I was a terrible person. You see, Linda was forbidden to see Andy. Nurse Jessop and Sellers were trying to convince Mrs. Isom that she *was* seeing him—not altogether innocently, in their account. They didn't dare say that to her outright. They hinted at it, and at my part in it. Marie Isom pretended, at least, she didn't understand what they were getting at. I thought they'd hired a detective. I saw a letter from a detective agency in Quentin Sellers's dinner-jacket pocket when I took it down to be pressed one morning. I didn't read it, I simply drew the obvious conclusion."

"So, when I kept turning up, you thought I——"

She nodded. "I hope you'll forgive me."

Mr. Pinkerton laughed.

"So, that day in the Aquarium—only yesterday, wasn't it?—I thought you'd spoil everything," she said. "I was very rude. And when I saw you this morning I was terrified."

"Are you sure," Mr. Pinkerton asked soberly, "that they *did* hire a detective?"

She shook her head. "No. Not any more. I do think, though, that something has been happening. Something I've not known about."

"What sort of thing?"

"I don't know."

Amelia Arnold's long thin hands raised in an abrupt nervous gesture. Her handkerchief brushed off her lap. Mr. Pinkerton reached down and picked it up. It had a pleasant odour of lavender that brought, from somewhere, a faint nostalgic stirring in his heart. He put it back into her hand. She did not stop speaking.

"Did you ever live anywhere, and suddenly realize that something strange was going on all round you, that you knew nothing about? It . . . it's like being in a forest full of visible things you can't see, and sounds you can't hear. Oh, I know it doesn't make sense. But

that's the way I've felt for the last few days—even before Mrs. Isom sent me to town on Sunday."

Mr. Pinkerton started to ask why she had been sent, and then decided that after all it was none of his affair. Miss Arnold understood him.

"I was to take some instructions to Mr. Evill," she said. "They were written and sealed, to be delivered by my hand into his. Mrs. Isom was very particular about such matters."

Mr. Pinkerton nodded. He could well imagine it.

"All I know is that I sat on the steps outside his chambers at Lincoln's Inn for two hours on Sunday morning, waiting for him to get up, and that he was very annoyed. At me, not at Mrs. Isom, curiously. And he was quite rude."

Mr. Pinkerton thought of the odd pompous man with the strawberry birthmark, whom he had first seen in the Royal Kitchen of the Pavilion, just before—or could it possibly, he wondered, have been just after—Mrs. Isom was killed. He remembered thinking for a moment that it was the White Rabbit out of *Alice in Wonderland*.

"He was rude when I told him I had to watch him open and read his orders, so I could assure Mrs. Isom he had done so. It was after that that I saw you at Lyons' and on the train. I suppose I was nervous and upset."

"You mustn't worry about that any more," Mr. Pinkerton said hastily. He was himself worried, however, about the detective, especially in the light of Mr. Quentin Sellers's last remark to Linda Farrell back there in the Isom library, with Mr. Pinkerton cowering behind the sofa. What purpose would Mrs. Isom have for calling in a detective, and why, if she had done, would a letter from him be in Mr. Sellers's dinner-jacket pocket? He wondered if the idea of blackmail was as far-fetched as it had sounded to Colonel Isom. Or had it really sounded so?

He mentioned the idea timidly. Amelia Arnold shook her head.

"What could she be blackmailed about?" she asked. "She had no social position to lose. She'd made it perfectly clear to all their old friends that she didn't want them about borrowing money from her and making the Colonel drink all the time. Not that he doesn't do it without them, even more than he used to with them. Then it couldn't be an old lover. She had plenty of them and nobody ever minded. And that would have been a long time ago. Anyway, she never cared what people thought of her."

"What about Noakes?" Mr. Pinkerton asked, with some hesitation.

Miss Arnold smiled a little.

"I'm the wrong person to ask about him. You see, I'm an unpaid housekeeper, without authority to sack him, and he knows it. He's always made my job as hard as he could. He's not been with us long, a little over a year."

"And . . . Nurse Jessop?"

"She's capable," Miss Arnold said shortly. "I'd be trying to pretend I'm better than I am if I didn't admit that I dislike her and distrust her. We've had nothing but trouble since she's been here. Sometimes it's almost seemed as if she was trying to get both Linda and me put out of the house. I like people that don't steadily mean one thing and say another."

"Is she . . . friendly with Mr. Sellers?"

"In a matter-of-fact way. I mean matter-of-fact for her. She always makes up to the gentlemen."

Mr. Pinkerton, flushing, noticed that while almost any woman knowing—as he could have no doubt Miss Arnold did—that he had himself spent the evening with Nurse Jessop, would have said "as you've noticed," Miss Arnold did not. He was grateful.

"I think Linda and I are a little afraid of her," she added. "Maybe we're jealous of her, as Mrs. Isom

said. She's been here only eighteen months, but it seems forever that I'd forgotten, really, when she did come."

Miss Arnold got up suddenly. She turned grateful eyes to the little grey man.

"I feel better," she said quietly. "Somehow, when you're in that house with everybody sitting about, perfectly silent, watching each other, and Noakes creeping about, things seem so . . . so *ominous*, and terrifying even. Here, talking with you, they drop into place, as real things that you can see and touch and measure. I thought for a moment, when Linda flung the curtains open, that sanity as well as light was getting in for the first time for years."

She stood for a long time, quite still. Mr. Pinkerton, standing there beside her, looking out from the cliff top across the broad dark water, found himself thinking aloud.

"The sea is calm to-night.
The tide is full, the moon lies fair
Upon the straits . . ."

The long-unremembered words came slowly back to him.

"Listen! you hear the grating roar
Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,
At their return, up the high strand,
Begin, and cease, and then again begin,
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
The eternal note of sadness in."

It was many years since Mr. Pinkerton had stood on the cliffs at night reciting poetry. He looked quickly at Miss Arnold, to see if she had understood, and heard her quiet voice going on:

" . . . the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;

And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night."

They stood a moment, the grey little man and the lonely woman, transmuted by the magic of the poet and the night into something far removed from the grim fact that back there in the square the bitter reality of Marie Louise Isom's murder still waited for them.

They walked back slowly. Mr. Pinkerton left her where Lewes Crescent curves into Sussex Square.

"You'll help me . . . to save Linda?" she said quietly.

Mr. Pinkerton nodded silently, and watched her disappear round the curving driveway.

CHAPTER XVII

A FEW minutes later he scuttled across King's Road and through Little East Street into Bartholomews, where Brighton's Town Hall stands, an extraordinary cross between a brownish pseudo-classic temple and an obsolete brownish double-decked omnibus.

A couple of men were lounging in the open doorway of the garage, where he could see the Chief Constable's car standing. A blue-helmeted constable came out of the basement door marked "Police." Mr. Pinkerton, who had a nose for such things, hurried round to what was apparently the front of the building, as the columns there were more hugely leggy, and went through the impressive marble corridor and into the small square ante-room with its plain table and four straight uninviting chairs. He knocked at the Chief Constable's door.

Inspector Bull, standing with his back to the window, looked up. Mr. Pinkerton looked at him for an instant with a sinking heart. It looked to him as if Bull was displeased, which would never do of course. Bull however was chiefly puzzled, at the almost exalted look on the little man's face. He was also worried. He was much too fond of Mr. Pinkerton to see him fall into the hands of so blonde a woman as Nurse Jessop. An idea still more worrying came suddenly to him. Could Jessop have discovered, in some way, that the grey little Welshman was really a very wealthy man? Bull shook his head. It seemed virtually impossible. No one, not even Nurse Jessop, could conceivably guess it.

Mr. Pinkerton was so upset, momentarily, that it was a full instant before he realized that there were three other persons in the room too. One of them was Inspector Johnson, another the Chief Constable. The

third was Andrew Read, and he appeared to be the only one of them who was entirely and cheerfully blithe and carefree.

"You weren't in the kitchen at any time, then?"

Andy Read shook his head.

"At no time, sir," he said affably. "I met Miss Farrell in that room you herded all us criminal suspects into. We sat on that table, talking, until a couple of people came in sight-seeing. We went across and sat down in one of those drawing-rooms on the other side."

He lighted a cigarette and flicked the match into the Chief Constable's wastepaper-basket.

"Perhaps I can save more time if I admit again, right off the bat once more, that I wasn't much interested in the dragons or the chandeliers. No, it just happened to be the only quiet place I've found in Brighton where you can talk to a girl."

"You admit you're interested in Miss Farrell, I take it," Mr. Farquarson said—not unironically, Mr. Pinkerton hoped.

Read grinned. "I'm nuts about her."

Mr. Pinkerton took a deep breath and adjusted his steel-rimmed spectacles. This was very good. He liked Americans to sound like Americans.

"You'll also admit that her guardian, Mrs. Isom, was not, however, as you say, nuts about you?" Farquarson asked sardonically.

"Gosh, no," Andy Read replied cheerfully. "No, I was rank poison to the old girl. The fact remains, however, that she was dead when I went in there, and that I didn't kill her."

The Chief Constable looked at him intently, his eyes bright under shaggy white brows. "Mr. Read—Miss Linda Farrell says that her guardian was alive *after* you left the Music Room. She saw you go in and come out. She went in herself, and talked with Mrs. Isom."

Read shook his head. "She's nuts," he said calmly.

It was confusing to Mr. Pinkerton, who had just stored away in his mind the fact that nuts meant being in love with someone.

"I mean, she's crazy. She doesn't know what she's talking about. She'd left the Pavilion before any of this happened. Early in the scene."

"Possibly she saw her guardian before you did, Mr. Read?"

"Possibly she didn't," Read said shortly. The grin disappeared from his irregularly good-looking face.

"No, I saw her go before I went anywhere near the place. She didn't go there at all."

"What if I were to tell you, Mr. Read, that we have evidence to the effect that some man crossed the Pavilion lawn, went in through the open window and into the Music Room, *after* Miss Farrell had left it . . . and that Mrs. Isom was still alive?"

Read grinned cheerfully again. "You'd have me. My story is, she never saw the old lady at all."

"One more thing." Farquarson held up the sheaf of yellow cablegrams taken from the hotel room, and a sheaf of handwritten post office forms.

"You probably recognize these. You've been pretty hard up, Mr. Read, in spite of the fact that your father seems to have sent you a tidy sum of money since you've been in this country. Well, how do you explain these?"

He tapped a little pile of notes on the table in front of him. Mr. Pinkerton realized that they would be the hundred pounds that Read had been relieved of when detained.

"That's my business, I'm afraid, gentlemen."

The Chief Constable shook his head. "Ours too, I'm afraid. In view of the fact that the leather envelope removed from Mrs. Isom's possession contained a large sum of money."

"You're telling me," said Mr. Read.

Farquarson looked puzzled.

"He means," Mr. Pinkerton explained quickly "that he knows it better than you do."

"May I ask how, Mr. Read?"

The Chief Constable glanced at Bull. Mr. Pinkerton saw that it was an interesting point. No one present in the Pavilion at the time of the murder of Mrs. Isom had mentioned to the police that she had had five thousand pounds with her, or had admitted knowing it, until the Pavilion had been cleared.

Andy Read nodded coolly. "Everybody there seemed to know it. At least everybody I saw."

"I don't understand," Farquarson said.

"Well, the chap with the strawberry mark was bleating about it to his friend Mr. Sellers. Most unwise for the old girl to carry that much money about with her. Wondering if he couldn't have taken charge of it for her. Maybe he did, Mr. Farquarson. Maybe Mr. Evill—Lord, what a name for a murderer!—maybe Mr. Evill did it himself. I wouldn't know."

"If you really don't know, you can let us look after the investigation," the Chief Constable said politely. "You did know, I believe, that she was accustomed to carry large sums of cash about with her."

Andy Read shook his head. "I certainly know she once had a large sum of cash in the house," he said, with equal politeness. "Didn't know she'd be so foolish as to go sight-seeing with the same. Well, you think I took the old girl's money. So what? By that I mean, what are you going to do about it?"

He took an old blackened pipe out of his jacket pocket and put it between his strong white teeth, unlighted and unfilled.

"What I mean is, if you're bent on making me the goat in this affair, I'd like to know it as soon as possible."

"You still insist Mrs. Isom was dead, or appeared to be dead so far as you could tell from the Gallery door, when you went there?"

Mr. Read smiled brightly. "Oh, rather," he said.

"That's my story, and I'm going to stick to it. I'll admit I didn't have any proof of it when I was there first. I knew it as soon as I heard she was dead."

He got up suddenly. "Well, I'd like to go to bed. I don't suppose the local ground rules allow the inmates a pint of bitter? And you know, all I'd like to know is whether I'm charged with theft, murder or rape. Just a natural un-British curiosity. I don't insist."

Farquarson frowned.

"You're not charged with anything, Mr. Read," he said slowly. "Nor have you been at any time. You have been held for questioning."

"I see," Read said. "Well, when does the questioning begin? Or have I been questioned?"

"You are being questioned. Another thing, Mr. Read."

"Shoot."

Farquarson looked down at a typed report on his desk.

"The medical report after autopsy states the possibility that Mrs. Isom had had a stroke, not a severe one but still a stroke, before that knife was thrust into her throat."

He stopped a moment. Read looked puzzled. "Yes?" he said.

"So that, when you saw her, and thought, according to your story, that she was dead, her head bent forward there, she may only have been unconscious from the stroke. What would you think of that?"

The young American looked intently at him for some time, and stared thoughtfully down at the typed report on the desk. Then he shook his head.

"She had the appearance of being dead and gone, to me," he said then. "That was my impression, when I thought about it later."

Farquarson nodded. "All right, Mr. Read. Think that over, please. You're free to go. I'll have to ask you to stay in Brighton for a time. The inquest will be

at ten-thirty to-morrow. You will be wanted to give evidence."

"O.K.," Andy Read said soberly. He then grinned in a very friendly fashion at everybody, including Mr. Pinkerton. The grey little man did not, as a rule, approve of excessive flippancy, particularly in serious matters, especially in matters concerning the police. However, the young man's smile was peculiarly infectious, and he grinned back shamelessly.

"I'll be there—ten-thirty sharp."

He took possession of the notecase and the hundred pounds, and started to pick up his father's cablegrams.

"I guess you'd like to keep these. Matter of future reference."

He crossed the room, stopped at the door and turned back.

"Since you're being civil and intelligent about it," he said, with another grin, "and just in case you really want to know where I got that money, I don't mind telling you. My kid brother sold my car for me and sent the proceeds over. You see, I was planning on staying in Brighton for a while anyway. As long as may be necessary for my purpose, in fact. Well, so long!"

He opened the door and went out. Mr. Pinkerton, who had been sitting on the edge of a chair close to it, grimaced significantly, or so he trusted, at Inspector Bull, and nipped out after him.

"I say!" he called breathlessly, dashing out through the marble corridor and on to the lop-sided portico.

Andrew Read was already well on his way, going along with swift vigorous strides. Neither he nor Mr. Pinkerton pursuing him noticed the ordinary-looking man in the dingy brown suit who disengaged himself leisurely from the shuttered door of the flower shop opposite and ambled after him.

"I say!" Mr. Pinkerton shouted. "Mr. Read!"

Andy Read turned round and looked at him blankly.

"I . . . I've got a message for you."

Read's face lighted suddenly. "No kidding!" he exclaimed. He slapped Mr. Pinkerton so vigorously on the shoulder that he felt for a moment as if either he or the pavement must give way.

He ran hastily through his meagre store of Americanisms and decided to skip it, as they said.

"Miss Farrell told me to tell you," he stammered hastily. "She told the Chief Constable, and Inspector Bull, and all the rest of them, that she'd seen and talked with Mrs. Isom after you'd left the Music Room. And that's what she's going to say at the inquest. And she says Mrs. Isom still had the black envelope, too."

Read stood on the corner, looking down at him.

"Thanks," he said. "That's the way it is. When did you see her? Was she all right?"

"Before dinner," Mr. Pinkerton replied. "She asked me to tell you she was all right, too."

He felt even as he said it that his voice gave away his own lack of confidence in Linda Farrell's statement. And of course the young man realized it at once.

"I . . . I saw Miss Arnold a little while ago," Mr. Pinkerton went on. "She was . . . worried about her."

It was, he realized, rather a translation of his knowledge of Mr. Sellers's intentions than anything else.

"Yes?" Read said. His face set grimly as he stared down at the eager little man. "I don't mind telling you I'm worried about her too. In fact, I'm worried sick. What are you thinking about? Anything——"

"Oh, it's nothing you could put your finger on," Mr. Pinkerton said quickly.

Read nodded, still staring down at him. "That's the trouble out there," he muttered. He looked suddenly at his watch. "If anything happens to that girl . . ."

Mr. Pinkerton did not hear the rest of it. The young man said "Thanks" again, turned abruptly and set

off with a free, long-legged stride toward King's Road.

Mr. Pinkerton glanced back once at the Chief Constable's windows. A conflict rose briefly in his mind. He set out on a trot after Andy Read. By increasing the trot to a run he was able to swing breathlessly on to the same bus just as it started up.

The Isom house was dark when Mr. Pinkerton, scurrying along behind Read's long easy strides, arrived behind him, quite out of breath by this time, at the door. The dim light from the lamp in Sussex Square pushed their two shadows low against the big door, and picked out Read's long muscular fingers impatiently pressing the bell. They heard its diffused peal somewhere inside the house, and waited. Read's hand moved out of the shadows and pressed the bell again, for a long time.

Mr. Pinkerton, listening to its dim vibrations, pictured the occupants of the house, hearing it each in his own way: Linda Farrell, Colonel Isom, Amelia Arnold, Nurse Jessop, Quentin Sellers, Marius Evill, the butler-chauffeur Noakes. Not that there was anything sinister in it, or should have been. Not at first, at any rate. He was not sure now, when Andy Read's impatient hand was pressing it again, until the low buzz seemed long and eerie, part of the emptiness and darkness and silence of the big house, in the empty silent square, with the low grating roar of the sea beyond.

To each one of them behind that door, Mr. Pinkerton thought, it must come with some special meaning. Linda Farrell—would she know it was Andy Read flying to her? Quentin Sellers—would he know it too, and resist it? The murderer . . . ? The terrible thing about murder was the awful consciousness of guilt. Mr. Pinkerton had often thought it was worse, much worse, than the actual fact of violently taking human life. Murder *qua* murder destroys one man or woman.

The guilty soul destroys itself, and destroys every human relationship, fearing where there is no need for fear.

Was Marie Louise Isom's murderer listening now, Mr. Pinkerton wondered? Sitting up there in his room, perhaps, or with others in a room, his face paler, his breath constricted, his hand colder, suddenly fearing every knock, haunted by every new sound.

They waited. It seemed an interminable time to Mr. Pinkerton. He knew that it must seem even longer to the young man there.

"Perhaps they've gone to bed," he suggested timidly.

"Perhaps they haven't," Read said curtly. He rang again and again, sharply, in short staccato buzzes, like an angry wasp bashing his head against a closed window.

"What the hell are they up to?" he demanded savagely. "They can't clear out now, can they? They've got to stick around for the inquest."

Mr. Pinkerton nodded in the half-dark outside the door.

"Perhaps they just aren't answering the door," he suggested helpfully.

Read stepped back into the middle of the road and peered up at the dark windows above the balcony. Mr. Pinkerton glanced anxiously at his set face as he came back.

"You're not really worried, are you?" he asked nervously. "I mean, you don't think anything's happened to her?"

Read said nothing. He put his finger on the bell and held it there. Mr. Pinkerton glanced apprehensively up and down the road. They might very easily be taken up as public nuisances, both of them. After all, if the Isoms did not care to answer their bell, it was their affair. There was no way of compelling them to do it.

"Perhaps we'd better go home and come back in the morning," he suggested.

Read looked round at him, his finger still on the bell.

"Go ahead," he said shortly. "Nothing's stopping you."

Then Mr. Pinkerton heard a sound, not of a door opening or closing somewhere above them, or of steps on the stairs, but a sharp click immediately in front of them, at the door. He moistened his dry lips nervously. It was unmistakable that someone had been standing there for some time, just behind the door, waiting for them to go.

Mr. Pinkerton blinked. Andy Read grinned at him silently, took his finger off the bell and stood there, his hands in his pockets. In the light from the square they could see the polished brass knob turn slowly. A narrow line of light broke the solid wall in front of them, and widened until it in turn was blocked by the dark figure of Noakes.

Mr. Pinkerton moved back a step. Knowing what he did of Americans, he was quite prepared to see young Read kick up a dreadful row, knock the butler down, push roughly past him—anything. That was what people did in the pictures.

But Andy Read did nothing of the sort. He merely said, very politely, "Will you tell Miss Farrell that I'd like to see her a few moments?"

Noakes bowed. "I'll see if she's in, sir. Will you step inside?"

There was no evidence that Andy Read was not a very welcome visitor of long standing.

They went in, Mr. Pinkerton pressing close behind. Noakes opened a door to the left in the hall. Mr. Pinkerton followed Read into a small reception-room. It was furnished in the full Victorian manner, with high-backed sofas, chairs with carved rosewood frames, faded yellow satin seats with crocheted antimacassars on their buttoned yellow satin backs. Heavy brown brocaded curtains covered the broad front windows looking out into the square. A large majolica jardinière

on a mother-of-pearl tabouret by the windows held an enormous aspidistra. A second one, with a towering rubber plant, stood in a corner near the fireplace. The air was dead and heavy with potpourri and orris.

Mr. Pinkerton sat down gingerly on the edge of a kidney-shaped sofa and peered cautiously about him, his new brown bowler gripped tightly on his knees with both hands. Noakes closed the polished mahogany door noiselessly—even more noiselessly, Mr. Pinkerton thought uneasily, than was really expected of the most superior servant. However, as he quickly realized, that could be set down to pure funk for of course he had not the remotest idea of what was expected of superior servants. His own experience had been entirely with very inferior servants, the sort that banged things about, left without giving notice, and not infrequently were the worse for liquor.

Read stood quietly in front of the fireplace. He could be a very silent young man on occasion, Mr. Pinkerton realized, with rather of a jolt. It was his distressing inaction that was most disturbing, however. He stood there, hands in pockets, doing nothing—lean and lank and very sober. It was a little alarming, Mr. Pinkerton thought. He looked at the door. If he were Andy Read, he was thinking, and wanted to see Linda Farrell, he would do things quite differently. To hint as much without actually making any suggestion, he got up and tip-toed over to the door. Read turned round just as he was about to put his hand on it.

“Don’t bother,” he said cheerfully. “It’s locked. Popeye saw to that.”

He grinned very pleasantly at the little man.

CHAPTER XVIII

"I . . . I thought I'd . . ." Mr. Pinkerton stammered.

"Sure. I thought of it too, but there's no use, even if it wasn't locked. You can't go barging about in people's houses at night. Not unless you want to take a chance of going back to the jug. Which I don't."

Mr. Pinkerton, if he understood, which he was not sure about, did not either. He returned meekly to his seat on the kidney-shaped sofa. It was just in time; almost immediately he heard a velvety key in the lock. The door opened silently, Noakes stepped in.

"Miss Farrell is sorry, sir, but she has a severe headache and begs to be excused."

He held the door open. Mr. Read nodded and sauntered out, not in the least disturbed or angry. Mr. Pinkerton followed mechanically, stunned, crushed and disillusioned. He had hoped for a better display of spirit from Mr. Andrew Read.

Noakes opened the front door.

"Miss Farrell also said, sir," he continued politely, "that she would be happy if you would leave Brighton. Your presence here is distressing to her."

Mr. Pinkerton's heart beat more quickly. Here, if ever . . . But the young man did nothing at all. He took his hat, said "Thank you—tell Miss Farrell I've taken up permanent residence in Brighton," and stepped out calmly into the night, with Mr. Pinkerton at his heels, quite ill with disappointment and mortification.

Shaking with rage and helplessness, he followed Andy Read silently along the square, and turned left with him into Lewes Crescent, and into Arundel Terrace. At King's Cliff he started to cross over to where they would take their bus. But Read did not cross. Instead

he turned sharply to the left, and went rapidly along Arundel Road.

Mr. Pinkerton stared, and hurried after him.

"Where . . . where are you going?" he gasped.

"To have a look around," Read said. "There's something screwy back there."

"I . . . I beg your pardon?"

"I said there's something screwy back there. I'm going to see what it's all about."

The young man spoke very patiently and quietly, but Mr. Pinkerton's heart beat more rapidly at once.

"I mean, either I'm cokeyed, or Popeye is lying. He never told Linda I was there in the first place. It was the Colonel's message he gave me in the second, or Sellers's, or somebody's. And so . . ."

He grinned down at the little man hurrying along at his side, taking two steps to one.

"I got your idea back there. But hell, if I'd acted like a sap, and pasted Popeye the way you wanted me to, and the way I was dying to, why, I'd be in jail for assault and battery. And Lord knows what they'd tell Linda. Lord knows what they've told her already. And she's a pushover for any line anybody wants to string her."

Mr. Pinkerton blinked as he trotted along. It was all most confusing. He had only the vaguest notion of what a pushover was. It was clear to him, however, that the tall, broad-shouldered, lean-jawed young man just turning sharply into Arundel Mews in front of him was more gifted with common sense, and not nearly as hot-headed, as he had appeared up to the present time.

Trotting along, Mr. Pinkerton was comforted by that discovery . . . in a sense. In another sense he was disturbed. It meant readjusting his notions about all Mr. Read's evidence. It had appeared quite simple, so far, to Mr. Pinkerton, that he had put up the plainest kind of a false story, just to protect Linda Farrell . . . just as Linda had then obviously told the plainest kind

of a false story just to protect him. Mr. Pinkerton shook his head. Why, otherwise, had the young man maintained so stoutly that Mrs. Isom was dead when he went into the Music Room? If he was simply being quixotic, that was easy to understand; but now, with him acting like not only a very resolute but a coolly intelligent person . . . Still, perhaps the old woman *had* been dead when he saw her.

In another moment he was not so sure Read was acting like a sane person, really. When they rounded the curve of Arundel Mews, where the white letters on the door set in the wall said "Tradesmen's Entrance, 88 Lewes Crescent," he began to suspect that Andy Read was a stark maniac.

"Whatever are you doing?" he demanded breathlessly.

High bare walls rose on either side of Arundel Mews. On the left were the rear entrances to the great houses in Sussex Square and Lewes Crescent. Some of them had been built out, so that what had originally been small enclosed gardens were filled, like town houses, with bulbous conservatories or mews flats. The Isoms' house was one of them. That there was still a small space between the house proper and the wall was evident from the top of the tree visible over the wall. Beyond that Mr. Pinkerton could make out, in the darkness, a large rounding protuberance, built on to the original house from basement to first floor. It had high windows and a narrow balcony full of flower-pots. The windows were closed and the curtains drawn. In one or two places Mr. Pinkerton thought he could see tiny spears of light coming through into the blackness.

"That will be the library," he whispered, plucking Read's sleeve. He realized instantly, by the easy nod he got in return, that Read knew far more about this than he did. That brought the thought suddenly to him that he was rather in the way, possibly. He cleared his throat nervously.

"If I . . . I mean, if I'm in the way . . ." he began.

Andy Read looked down at him.

"Look here, Toots," he said patiently. "You're about to witness an illegal entry into the property of the late Marie Louise Isom of blessed memory. Now, you invited yourself. If you want to stay, stay. If you don't, scram. But whichever you do, do it, and for God's sake pipe down."

Mr. Pinkerton moistened his very dry lips. "You . . . you mean you'd like me to be quiet?"

Read grinned. "That's right."

Mr. Pinkerton nodded. He glanced cautiously up and down the deserted mews and up at the Isoms' library windows. Read chuckled.

"It'll be all right," he said. "No lives will be lost. You start singing something if you see anybody coming."

"Oh . . . I couldn't do that!" Mr. Pinkerton stammered hastily.

Read was already across the narrow road, and before Mr. Pinkerton could make out how he had done it he was scrambling over the top of the wall, swearing quietly but strongly. A piece of broken bottle struck the pavement. The Isom wall was apparently prepared for such visitations.

When Mr. Pinkerton looked again, Read was gone. He could see the top of the tree shaking violently.

Mr. Pinkerton shook violently himself. What, he was thinking, if they should get caught? An army of constables could pass that way without his being able to utter a single note of "Men of Harlech," which was the only song he knew, to warn him. He tried singing softly to himself in the way of practice, but nothing but dry rasping sounds, rather like a nutmeg being grated, came from his throat.

He moved back against the wall. His eyes, accustomed now to the luminous darkness, made out moving forms everywhere, but there was none against the honey-coloured stone of the Isoms' library wall. He closed his

eyes, straining his ears desperately to hear some sound. At last he did hear it. He opened his eyes. A long dark figure was climbing with the practised ease of an Alpine cat burglar up the wall dividing the Isom garden from their neighbours'. He saw Andy Read catch hold of the balcony railing and draw himself up.

Mr. Pinkerton looked desperately up and down the news, his heart racing. But he knew there was not much point in it. Andy Read's great danger lay behind the darkened windows, inside the house. Mr. Pinkerton watched him move along the balcony to where a tiny chink of light had shown. There he stopped. It seemed ages that he stood there. Mr. Pinkerton's heart slowly chilled; something was wrong. He knew it as well as if he had been standing there at the library window himself, peering in. He knew it perfectly even before he saw Andy Read move slowly and silently away and disappear from the balcony.

He waited then interminably, his eyes glued on the house until everything, even the house itself, began to move in queer formless masses. It was ages again before he heard a soft footfall, a scramble, a falling piece of glass, and saw Andy Read balanced again on the top of the Isom wall. Then he was down in the mews beside the breathless little man.

"Did you cut yourself?" Mr. Pinkerton asked in a whisper.

"Not much," Andy said perfunctorily.

He brushed off his knees and elbows. Mr. Pinkerton saw a large rent in his tweed jacket and another in his flannel trouser leg.

"Let's go," the young man said shortly. They set off along Arundel Mews.

"Is . . . something wrong?" Mr. Pinkerton inquired timidly.

"Plenty."

They went on, Mr. Pinkerton trotting to keep up with his long strides. They came under the light at the

curve toward the sea. Mr. Pinkerton saw that his face was pale, his dark eyes fixed straight in front of him, his lips a hard line in a lean set jaw. Mr. Pinkerton trotted along very unhappily. The picture of Quentin Sellers in that room less than two hours before was vivid in his mind. He tried to think of something he could say, some way he could inquire, that would not sound impertinent or prying. But nothing seemed adequate. And yet it was obvious that something was terribly wrong, of course, and something ought to be said.

As they turned into Arundel Road he said, "I . . . don't think you ought to blame Miss Farrell. I . . . well, I don't think she's really a . . . quite a free agent . . . if you know what I mean?"

Andy Read looked at him queerly. It gave so much the impression that he was aware of his existence for the first time that Mr. Pinkerton was crushed.

All the flippancy and cheerfulness had gone out of Mr. Read.

He stood there silent for a moment. Then he said, "Free agent. That's good." His tone was so dead and bitter that Mr. Pinkerton had to repress a shiver.

They came to the end of Arundel Road. In front of them in the night was Black Rock Pool, where Mr. Pinkerton had taken Nurse Jessop that evening, and the sea. To the left, Suicide Corner, the white cliffs, and the rolling downs. To the right, King's Road into the town.

"Well, so long," Read said. "See you to-morrow."

He gave Mr. Pinkerton a twisted grin, and had gone before the little man had realized that he was dismissed for the night. He could see the long-legged broad-shouldered form striding off into the dark.

Mr. Pinkerton took a deep and unhappy breath.

"I do hope nothing happens to him," he thought. He stood there quite still a long time, a dismally cold feeling in the pit of his stomach.

A constable strolling by looked at him, came down the road and stood unostentatiously close to the wire barrier at the corner, where the cliff goes sheerly down to the concrete below. Mr. Pinkerton blinked and moved across to the bus stop as quickly as he could.

CHAPTER XIX

MILLIONS of points of light, red and yellow and blue, danced from the magnificent pagoda-shaped lustre in the centre of the Music Room of the Brighton Pavilion, with its great water-lily bowl suspended from the calyx of a sunflower in the silver-scaled dome by chains of sparkling jewels, supported with mighty claws by four dragons with folded wings and tails entwined at the centre.

Under its exotic splendour Inspector Bull, stolid, burly and tawny, and Detective-Inspector Johnson of the Brighton Constabulary, thick-set, dark, broad-faced, with curiously blunt features, looked strangely out of place. The little Welshman standing meekly in the Gallery door was thinking that, and also how they stood for something—say the Social Order—that was completely foreign to the concept behind the gilded dragons and the water-lilies, and all the pomp and vanity of a wicked long-dead world.

Inspector Bull shook his head.

“One of the troubles of mass production,” he said, with a feeble attempt at humour. “There’s not a soul here can say that knife came from the kitchen.”

Mr. Pinkerton pricked up his ears. He had gathered from his hasty reading of the London papers that that was all settled.

“They had knives like it, they’ve still got some. They don’t know if one’s missing. If it is missing, it may have been gone for months. And they don’t know this is it, anyway.”

It upset Mr. Pinkerton. He had been glad to think that one point was sure. “What about the Isom cook?” he ventured.

Inspector Johnson nodded moodily.

"We went there, of course. They had several like it. They're made by the thousands. I've got two of 'em at home. The cook there doesn't know if this is one of those they had, and anyway, they've been gone for weeks. I asked Miss Arnold too—she's virtually house-keeper there. She bought six exactly like it at a shop in Oxford Street in May. She always gets them there, and she always gets several at a time, because the cook throws 'em out in the dustbin with the potato peelings at the rate of six or eight a year, along with coffee spoons if she don't count 'em after each meal."

Bull shook his head. That was also one of Crissie's failings at their home, that and burning the bottoms out of aluminium pots.

"The cook says it couldn't have been May she bought 'em, because she'd not had a decent knife in the scullery for at least six months, and if the kitchen wasn't dark as sin she wouldn't always be throwing things out. So that's the situation there."

Inspector Johnson looked very coldly at the little man in the doorway, as if in some odd fashion Mr. Pinkerton were responsible for it.

"I'll stick to it, of course. But that's easy evidence for a defence to turn against us, so far."

"If we could show," Bull said meditatively, "that the knife did come out of the kitchen here, where would we be?"

Johnson frowned. "The solicitor was in there," he said doubtfully. "The little—your friend here; and Colonel Isom went out through it. Nobody else was in there, according to their stories."

Inspector Bull chewed one end of his tawny moustache and moved back to where a chalk pattern and a spot on the floor marked all that was left to show Marie Louise Isom's savage end, or the fact that she had met it here in the Music Room under the great translucent water-lily.

Mr. Pinkerton could easily see her sitting there still, with the slow viscid serpent writhing down her baggy throat. He turned away, feeling a little ill. It was strange how Bull could stand there talking about it as matter-of-fact as if he were the plumber called in about the drains.

"Well," Bull said stolidly, "so far it looks something like this. Nurse Jessop brings the old lady to the Pavilion, as far as we can figure out from Pinkerton's memory of the times and what these other people say, at 11.5, and brought her fairly directly to this room. She's here, in the bath-chair, then, at say 11.10. Her body is found here—that's to say it's found by the Arnold woman, who does something about it—at 11.46 as near as we can say. Pinkerton comes in just then, or a minute later, and sees her standing here, terrified."

Inspector Johnson nodded. "It was 11.54 exactly when he put in the call. The operator made a note of it.

"How long would it have taken you to get out there, Pinkerton?"

Mr. Pinkerton thought. "That would be about right, I expect," he said. "I . . . I hurried as fast as I could. But I had to stop to warn the guide with the ladies. It seemed much longer, hours really, but I expect it was about three or four minutes. And I stood in here for a minute, at least, before I went out."

"All right," Inspector Bull said. "Say she was killed between 11.10 and 11.45, a minute before Arnold got in and found her. But of course we can cut it down a lot more. Jessop didn't leave her at once. Say she was here two or three minutes with her. She thinks she left her about 11.15. We take that as the last time, according to the evidence so far, that anybody saw the old woman alive, with the possible exception of Miss Linda Farrell . . . and two other people."

He looked at Mr. Pinkerton. "Your friends Steve and Polly, of course. We don't know much about them

yet. Now, then. Miss Arnold, hurrying back to see the two young people and warn them that Sellers was here, comes into the Music Room, sees Mrs. Isom collapsed in the chair, and rushes out, looking for Nurse Jessop first in the Gallery there and then in the upstairs apartments. Mr. Read, coming in also, to talk to her, sees Mrs. Isom in the bath-chair, collapsed. He goes on and does nothing for some reason known to him. Now, we've got to establish the times that each of them came in. Because they both looked at her from the Gallery side, her back was toward 'em, and of course she might easily have been killed then.

"Now then, if their stories are true, we can establish that Read came in here after Miss Arnold went out to hunt Nurse Jessop. He says he looked in at the door, saw her like that, decided for one reason or another not to speak to her, and went on up the north stairs. Miss Arnold says she was looking for Jessop about four minutes, or five, as nearly as she can tell; and when she came back, down those stairs, she passed Andy Read going up. She went down the Gallery for a minute or so and came back, then came on in, discovering Mrs. Isom's murder at 11.45. That gives us these times:—

Miss Arnold comes back and sees Mrs. Isom	
ill or collapsed, as she thinks, at	11.39
Mr. Read comes to the Gallery door and	
doesn't go in, but goes upstairs	11.40
	or 11.41
Miss Arnold, coming downstairs, passes him	11.41

"You saw her, Pinkerton," Bull went on, "as we figured, standing there looking up the stairs, at 11.42. Which works out as nearly as we can expect it to do. Have you any idea if she was coming down, or going up?"

Mr. Pinkerton tried to remember. It was hard to tell, of course. He could clearly remember seeing her there, just as he had taken three or four steps into the

Gallery, having come out into it the wrong way, according to the signs, with her raincoat and umbrella and blue straw hat. But of course she was only standing.

"She was looking up," he said. "I should have thought she was on her way down. I don't know why."

Bull nodded. "No doubt she was coming down, looking back for Jessop. You'd turn back and look up if you were coming down. If you were going up, you wouldn't stand and look, you'd keep on with it."

Mr. Pinkerton nodded too. That would no doubt be it. It was reasonable.

"All right, then. Mr. Andrew Read doesn't recall passing Miss Arnold on the stairs. It's my judgment, however, that they did pass, as she says. They're double stairs; he was going up one side, she was coming down the other. She says he was very distraught, he says so too. His words were, he could have passed a battalion without noticing it. He was thinking about something else. I expect this is all right, so far."

There was nothing in Inspector Bull's manner to indicate it, but Mr. Pinkerton could see easily that this was not good for Andy Read. It looked bad, and there was no question about it. He could tell that Bull thought so, he could see from the expression on Inspector Johnson's blunt face that he thought so too.

"But," Inspector Bull went on, "if Miss Arnold did look about for the nurse as long as she thinks she did, then she came back here the first time, and first discovered that Mrs. Isom was ill, *before* Andrew Read came in."

Mr. Pinkerton's grey face brightened instantly. He had not thought of that.

"If Read only had some explanation . . ." Bull said. "As it is, with his calmly going on and doing nothing, which looks very bad, it would appear that he's not telling a straight story. If he did kill her, he could have done this. He left the Music Room here, didn't go directly upstairs at all but went back into the drawing-

rooms, not into the Gallery, and was out there when Miss Arnold came in the first time. He then ran into somebody, or thought he was going to do, cut out into the Gallery and went upstairs, passing Miss Arnold at that time. That would be quite simple, and there's nothing against it but his bare word."

Mr. Pinkerton nodded very glumly. It was not true, of course, but it was possible, he could see.

"However," Bull continued calmly, "I don't think he did. So we've got to have a look at some of these other people. Now Nurse Jessop apparently has been telling a crooked story all along, and she's been up to some queer things. You heard her and some man, Pinkerton, at 11.24, we figured."

"Yes," Mr. Pinkerton said. "I . . . I'd just looked at my watch, after I saw Mr. Evill looking at his. That was him, of course, in the kitchen, just after Colonel Isom had gone out."

That reminded Mr. Pinkerton that he had not yet, in this crowded day, had the chance to tell Inspector Bull of his other discovery. He went on with some excitement.

"And the man with her, when I heard her there at 11.24, was Mr. Sellers," he said quickly. "I'm sure of that. I heard him this evening, talking to Miss Farrell. I mean, I heard him without seeing him, just as I'd done here."

"Sure of that, Pinkerton?"

"Oh yes, Inspector."

"Very good, then. The nurse and Sellers—she says she met him in the Gallery—were down here for an indefinite time, on the ground floor, and then went up to the apartments above. But there's one very odd thing about that. Miss Arnold was up there looking for Nurse Jessop, and couldn't find her."

Mr. Pinkerton nodded. "I . . . I'd noticed that," he said. "It would seem to point to the fact that . . . that perhaps they weren't up there at all."

"That's right. So, we've got some doubts about the nurse's being off this floor at all, in which case she could have done almost anything. Add that she and Sellers are pretty clearly in some kind of a conspiracy to do something."

"Yes!" Mr. Pinkerton said eagerly. Then he remembered that that very day he had heard Sellers promise Linda Farrell that Nurse Jessop would get the sack. Still, he thought quickly, that could mean anything or nothing, really. He hurried on.

"I . . . I was standing out there on the Parade, when they first brought Mrs. Isom there, in the car," he said. "And I think she didn't want to come at all. I think Nurse Jessop's story that she told me to-day about her wanting to come but not wanting Noakes to know about it is . . . is just poppycock. Nurse Jessop brought her here deliberately and against her will, so she could see those two young people together, and Miss Arnold. That's what she and Mr. Sellers were talking about when I overheard them."

"Is that why he killed her?" Inspector Johnson asked.

"Mr. Sellers?" Mr. Pinkerton said, puzzled.

"No. Mr. Andrew Read."

"Oh no!" Mr. Pinkerton cried earnestly. "Oh, I'm sure that can't be true."

Johnson smiled dryly. "You've just established an additional motive for him. I think you've done the trick. That added to the money. He's broke, of course, and the girl would be thrown out without a penny if the old lady had seen them together."

Mr. Pinkerton looked desperately at Bull. No ideas, of course, could be read in that great stolid face.

"It . . . it doesn't stand to reason that either Linda Farrell or Andrew Read killed Mrs. Isom," he said stubbornly.

He was painfully aware, at just that moment, that Bull had said many times that all he had to do to solve a murder was hang the person that Mr. Pinkerton was

most obstinately convinced was innocent. It was not fair, actually, for the little man had only made one mistake. But that one had become a legion.

"At least, it doesn't seem to me to do," he added. "I mean, the money alone is enough of a motive. Mr. Evill knew she'd got it here in Brighton at any rate, and I think you could assume he'd know she'd never leave it in that house. I expect Mr. Sellers was telling the truth about that. And Sellers admits he thought she had money, and her husband must have known it. Everybody knew it, probably, except Andrew Read. Colonel Isom was so anxious to get out that he even went out by the kitchen door. He could have killed her just after Nurse Jessop had gone. I should think he had motive enough even without the money. Nurse Jessop could have known about it. There doesn't seem to be much going on in the house that she misses, from all I can make out."

Mr. Pinkerton, glancing at Bull, thought he noticed a sardonic twinkle in his eyes. He flushed hotly. "Oh dear!" he thought. "Why do I go on like this? It's sure to make things much worse."

"That's all true, I expect," Inspector Johnson said, rather more civilly. "It still leaves Read with a strong motive, and it still leaves him as the only person who admits he saw her dead—and nobody had earlier so far as we can *prove*—and who did nothing about it."

Bull chewed the end of his moustache. "You didn't see him, Pinkerton, when you came along through the rooms?"

"No. Not after Miss Farrell had rushed away."

"He wasn't in sight, of course, on the stairs, when you went out into the hall?"

Mr. Pinkerton shook his head.

"And you went back, when you saw Miss Arnold there, and then hurried along, through the South Drawing-room, the Saloon and the North Drawing-room, to this room here?"

"That's right, Inspector," Mr. Pinkerton said.

"How long would it have taken you?"

"Oh, a short time. Two or three minutes, or four, possibly. It's quite a distance, of course, but I . . . I hurried along."

Mr. Pinkerton shivered. He could recall very clearly the sight he had seen, just on the very spot where Inspector Bull was now standing. And the appalled look on Amelia Arnold's face when he had asked her why she had done it.

An idea struck him suddenly. He left them talking in the Music Room and went out into the low brilliantly lighted Gallery. He stopped at the bottom of the stairs, standing there, looking up just as Amelia Arnold had done, and stood for some time, thinking. He then turned about and looked along the Gallery to the stairway at the opposite end. The Gallery, he remembered from his official guide, was one hundred and sixty-one feet long. It was also quite dark in the daytime.

Mr. Pinkerton thought hard. Let it be assumed, he thought, for the sake of simplicity—and perhaps it was true—that Nurse Jessop had gone upstairs, as she and Mr. Quentin Sellers claimed to have done. What if, when Amelia Arnold had gone up there to find her, and had not been able to do so, it had been for the excellent reason that Nurse Jessop was no longer there? What if she had gone rapidly to the south end of the upper floor and had already slipped down those other stairs, at the end of the long Gallery opposite Mr. Pinkerton?

She would be thinking, of course, that by then—whenever it was—the young people would have got out of the way. She could have cut into the Banqueting Room, through the door Mr. Pinkerton had peered out of when he had followed Andy and Linda, and then cut through into the Music Room.

Who but Nurse Jessop, Mr. Pinkerton thought suddenly with great excitement, would have known so

unerringly where the old woman's jugular vein was located?

But it was all so mixed up, he thought wretchedly. What, then, would Andrew Read have been doing? What, above all, of Linda's story that she had seen Mrs. Isom *after* Andy, and that her guardian had still been alive?

Inspector Bull, coming out into the Gallery, stared at him, stopped, stared again, and said, "What's wrong, Pinkerton?"

"Nothing," Mr. Pinkerton said hurriedly. Then he explained, beginning with the fact that his theory meant that someone was not telling the truth.

Inspector Bull's heavy face lighted slightly.

"My dear chap, of course somebody's lying," he said calmly. "Probably they're all lying, the whole boiling, when you get down to it. If somebody's willing to commit murder to get rid of Mrs. Isom, or to get that money, or both, he wouldn't boggle at a few lies. The rest of 'em are frightened, either for themselves or somebody else. I doubt if we've had a word of truth so far. Get on with it."

Mr. Pinkerton did get on with it. He explained that the Gallery was one hundred and sixty-one feet long. It was his estimate that, if necessary, anybody could get from the opposite staircase to the Music Room in some ten seconds. Nurse Jessop, for instance. With the flat heels and rubber soles of a nursing sister she could do it easily in that time, and not really running. She could have been entering the Music Room through the door from the North Drawing-room while Miss Arnold was standing out there even, looking up the stairs after Andy Read's disappearing form.

Inspector Bull stood, one foot on the third stair, his elbow on his knee, chewing the end of his moustache. Mr. Pinkerton, his theory expounded, waited a little as a magician waits with his rabbit in one hand, his top-hat in the other, for his audience's gasp and

applause. Bull said "Hmph!" and nodded soberly. "Read was lying, then?" he asked.

Mr. Pinkerton hesitated. He did not like to say so. However, his theory of course depended on it.

"They were both lying, probably," he said. "Read saw her, but she wasn't dead. Miss Farrell either saw her later, and she was dead, or didn't see her at all, which is the most probable. Each one of them is lying, trying to shield the other."

Bull chewed his moustache. "We'll see," he said placidly. "Of course, there are two very important points that you're leaving out. I should think all this business might very well hinge on them."

"What are they?" Mr. Pinkerton asked, a bit dashed.

"Why was the kitchen door unlocked?" Inspector Bull said. "Why was the knife left in her throat?"

Mr. Pinkerton thought about them. It was true that his theory did not, so far, include any ideas about the kitchen or the kitchen door, or the knife. It was plain, he thought, that Bull had no great opinion of his analysis of Nurse Jessop's possible activities. If Mr. Pinkerton had not seen him, a few moments later, dashing in a ludicrous half-walk, half-run, taking steps half as long as he normally would, from the opposite staircase to the end of the Gallery, he would not have believed his theory had made the slightest impression.

CHAPTER XX

THEY left the Pavilion grounds through the lovely south gate, gift of an India grateful for the hospital for Indian soldiers in the Pavilion during the war.

"It's a bit early to accuse Nurse Jessop of murder," Bull said. "We need evidence. She's been up to odd things, and there's no doubt she and Sellers are carrying on some kind of a deal. I . . . I doubt if the rest of her life's an open book."

Mr. Pinkerton caught his breath. That meant a great deal, coming from Bull. It might mean anything at all. It might mean even that she was a well-known criminal, guilty of everything from arson to high treason. It would certainly mean that the processes of investigation into that blonde young woman's past life either were then, or shortly would be, under way. He padded along anxiously by the big man, waiting in great excitement for him to go on. When Bull said nothing more he knew that he was not expected to ask questions.

They had crossed Castle Square into East Street, where the lights of the square were reflected eerily in the two large mirrors forming the lenses of the gold pince-nez sign over the oculist's on the corner, and turned up Market Street through Brighton Place into the Town Hall in Bartholomews, before Bull spoke again.

"Your friend Steve ought to be here by now," he said.

Mr. Pinkerton caught his breath again. "They caught them?" he cried.

"It was only a matter of time," Bull said patiently. "He turns out to be known. His name is Steve Burkett. He was recognized from your description, they checked on the finger-prints on the newspaper you brought along,

and they got him when he turned up at Simon Huidkopf's in Bishopsgate at 8.15."

Mr. Pinkerton, breathing rapidly as he trotted along, felt his blood warming. At least *something* definite had been done.

"Isn't . . . Simon Huidkopf a fence?" he asked hastily.

"That was the idea. He'd got a diamond clip to get rid of."

"Mrs. Isom's diamond clip?" Mr. Pinkerton said excitedly.

"It'll have to be identified before we can say that."

Mr. Pinkerton, greatly pleased, was a little annoyed as well. He felt like a child who had come in after all the Christmas gifts had been opened and dispersed. "When did you learn all this?" he demanded.

"Part of it while you were dining with Nurse Jessop," Bull answered cheerfully.

"Oh," Mr. Pinkerton said. Cheated as he was, he nevertheless had a certain satisfaction in the knowledge that it had not been that at all—for at 8.15 he had not been for some time with Nurse Jessop—and that Inspector Bull was not quite as omniscient as he appeared.

"And part while you were sitting on the cliff looking at the sea with Miss Arnold," Bull added, as he opened the door to the Chief Constable's room.

Mr. Pinkerton had barely time to blink. As they came into the little room he stepped closer to Bull. Seated in front of the window was Steve Burkett. He had on a bright blue flannel lounge suit with chalk stripes, a lavender shirt with a green detachable collar, and a spotted tie. Beside him on the floor was a new pork-pie hat—grey this time, Mr. Pinkerton noticed, not green. His egg-shaped head glistened with perspiration, his cigarette-stained fingers twitched. He grinned out of one side of his mouth, just as he talked, when he saw Mr. Pinkerton.

"Hullo, Steve," Inspector Bull said.

Mr. Pinkerton sat down in his usual chair by the door. He would have got closer to Bull, except that Bull was much too close to Mr. Burkett.

Steve nodded.

"Didn't know you'd switched to murder, Steve."

"Now, now, Inspector," Steve said. "You know me better'n that. I ain't switched to nothink, an' that's the truth. First I 'eard anythink about murder is what that little bloke there says to me out of a clear sky 'e didn't want to get mixed up in it."

He imitated a timid precise voice that Mr. Pinkerton trusted with some indignation was not a tolerable reproduction of his own.

"I thought 'e was barmy, but I couldn't afford to take no chances, what with 'avin' already made a grievous error by accidentally pickin' up a sparkler wot didn't properly belong to me."

Bull nodded. "I want to know just one thing from you, Steve," he said. "I know you didn't kill her. And you didn't take the five thousand pounds. You haven't got the imagination."

Mr. Pinkerton trusted Inspector Bull knew what he was up to; and one look at Steve Burkett's popping eyes told him that Bull was right . . . unless of course Burkett was a far better actor than one would have imagined.

"Five . . ." his voice died out into stupefied silence.

"What I want to know is this, Steve. Was she dead when you got the clip, and you and Polly left?"

Burkett found his voice. "Now, Inspector—do I look like a blinkin' imbecile? I——"

"You acted like one, when you headed straight for Simon's."

Burkett thought it over for a moment.

"Right you are, Inspector," he said amiably. "Well, she wasn't dead. Of course, you know I wouldn't——"

"Then how did you accidentally pick this up?"

Mr. Pinkerton peered over at the desk. The Chief Constable of South Sussex was holding up an enormous diamond brooch. It sparkled almost as brilliantly as the cut glass lustres in the Pavilion, and to Mr. Pinkerton's rapid imagination was virtually as large. It must certainly, he thought, have been worth a great deal of money.

Steve looked at it sullenly.

"She wasn't dead, Inspector. Maybe she was half dead."

Mr. Pinkerton stared open-mouthed. Then he understood.

"What do you mean?" Bull asked.

"That's wot I mean. It . . . it don't sound reasonable, though."

"Get on with it."

Burkett hesitated again. "You see, Inspector, you've got to go back a bit. And I ain't never been one as likes to bore people with me personal 'istory."

"Go on," Bull said patiently. "I've been told all your personal history."

Steve shook his head.

"Not all of it, Inspector, I'll tell you. I ain't gousin', mind you. It's circumstances I'm fed up with. 'Ere's wot 'appens. Last night my girl an' me, we comes to Brighton to get a w'iff of this 'ere blinkin' air you 'ears about. An' wot 'appens?"

Steve shrugged eloquently.

"We was on 'oliday, no thought of the morrow, like kids we was. Innocent as lambs. We goes in this 'ere ruddy place 'cos Polly ain't never seen nothink but a palace of fun. An' who do we see, big as life, except she's dyed 'er 'air?"

Bull looked steadily at him. Mr. Pinkerton, perched uncomfortably on the edge of his hard chair by the door, stared breathlessly.

"Mrs. Isom?" Bull asked.

"Mrs. Isom?" Steve said blankly. "No. The sister."

"Oh," Bull said. "You knew the sister?"

Steve nodded. "That's the personal 'istory I was tellin' you of, Inspector."

"All right. Get on with it."

"It's wot you might call the long harm of circumstance," Steve said sombrely. "You see, she was at a plyce in the country I 'ad the misfortune to drop in at one night."

He shook his egg-shaped head.

"Three years an' two months at Wormwood Scrubs is wot that cost me, though you'd never believe it, Inspector. Well, this—er—this lydy was there, in this plyce, an' another bloke. I don't like to accuse people, as you'd know, Inspector, if you'd known me better, but there was things missin' that night, w'en they called the perlice, that *I* never takes, Inspector."

Bull scowled and nodded at the same time. "Sexton Old Bridge," he said. "Sir Arthur Bayley's place."

Burkett grinned. "It's a mem'ry you've got, Inspector."

"There wasn't any question of the nurse there," Bull said shortly.

Burkett shook his head quickly. "Not except with me, Inspector. *I* 'ad plenty of questions. No, we all sat tight, an' it was all put on me, o' course. I didn't care."

"In fact, you thought it might be useful to you when you got out," he said.

A definite look of pain came to Mr. Burkett's shining features. He raised his right hand solemnly. "I never saw 'er agayn till this morning, so 'elp me," he said earnestly. "An' w'en I 'ears somethin' beside the sparklers was missin' that night, you could 'ave knocked me over with a bleedin' feather, you could."

Bull nodded perfunctorily. "Did the sister see you, this morning?"

Steve shook his head.

"Where was she when you saw her?"

"In the room with the snykes."

"With Mrs. Isom?"

"She's the 'orrible old person with the purple dress?"

Bull nodded. "She's the one you got this from." He jerked his thumb toward the diamonds glittering on the Chief Constable's desk.

Steve nodded.

"What was she doing?"

Mr. Pinkerton, gazing avidly from his perch near the door, saw genuine hesitation and reluctance on the man's face.

"Inspector, there ain't no use askin' me that. Nobody'd believe me, if I was to swear God's truth on a Bible. No jury, I means, an' I'd be a proper monkey in a box."

"You aren't in a box," Bull said curtly. "Not yet. I want to know what she was doing. What you and Polly saw when you walked into the door of the Music Room—that room."

His voice was low and placid, but Steve Burkett winced and shifted uneasily.

"It . . . ain't so much that *I* saw anythink," he said doggedly.

Bull looked slowly at the brooch on the desk.

"Think again," he said calmly.

Burkett followed his glance and shrugged.

"Her an' the old lydy was 'avin' a fight. The old lydy was awavin' 'er stick about, syin' she was on to 'er an' 'er w'ys. Old woman grabs the leather thing she 'ad in 'er lap, an' tries to yell. She chokes, like. 'Er 'andbag slips out of 'er lap, an' pops open. That's w'en I sees that there object."

"Go on."

"That's all there is, Inspector—almost. Sister stares at 'er there like she was seein' things. Then she picks up the stick quick like, which 'ad fallen down on the floor. She props it by the old lydy's chair. Old lydy's 'ead is down on 'er chest. She breathes like a . . . like

a water-buffalo, if you knows wot I mean, Inspector. Sister just stands there, starin' at 'er, like. Then Polly, she drops 'er rock, 'er piece of rock she's bought, makin' a racket. Then sister gets the wind up, 'earin' the noise, y'see, an' she gets away quick. She nips out the other door, Inspector, off that w'y."

Mr. Burkett gestured to his left. Mr. Pinkerton, listening with avid attention, his heart pounding with excitement, understood. Steve and Polly would have been standing in the door coming from the North Drawing-room; Nurse Jessop, when she had heard them, would have gone out by the Gallery door. Mr. Pinkerton's grey little ego swelled and turned a much richer colour; for this, if it could be believed, and he could see that both Inspector Bull and the Chief Constable were listening with close and serious attention, was definite evidence either that his own little theory was correct or that Nurse Jessop—and by inference Mr. Quentin Sellers—had never been upstairs in the Pavilion at all. Here was the clearest and, so far as Mr. Pinkerton was able to judge, the most disinterested testimony that she had been back in the Music Room, and more: she had actually had a quarrel with the old lady. Mr. Pinkerton figured rapidly. He had met Steve and Polly, then coming rapidly, almost at a run, out of the north end of the Pavilion, at about 11.38 as nearly as he and Inspector Bull had been able to determine. The episode of Nurse Jessop and Mrs. Isom must have occurred then at 11.36 or 11.37, say; a couple of minutes, perhaps a little more, before Miss Amelia Arnold had come back to the Pavilion for the second time that morning, seeking to warn Linda and Andy that Sellers was about.

Mr. Pinkerton, his mind leaping agilely about, thought of something else. Nurse Jessop, after nipping out of the Music Room when alarmed by Polly's dropping the Brighton rock, would undoubtedly have got out of the way in the simplest possible manner,

namely, by going up the stairs just at the Gallery door of the Music Room. That would explain why she did not meet Miss Arnold, then coming up the Gallery from the main entrance. Mr. Pinkerton paused. It would not, however, explain why Miss Arnold had not been able to find her upstairs.

"And you went in, then?" Bull said.

Steve nodded. "I nips in an' picks the sparkler up when it falls out of 'er bag, which slides off 'er lap. I 'ad no w'y of knowin' the old woman was dead. She looks like she was took bad, but she was breathin' like a . . . like a blinkin' engine. Wot was I to do? I ain't no blinkin' Saint John's Ambulance Corps."

There was silence in the little room for an instant. Mr. Pinkerton could hear his heart beating. He wondered. Would it be conceivable that Nurse Jessop, realizing, somewhere outside, that Mrs. Isom was helpless there, had come back, to get the money perhaps, and then, possibly surprised by Mrs. Isom's coming to, perhaps, had killed her?

"Did you see a knife there?" the Chief Constable asked abruptly.

Burkett turned. "Knife? You mean she was done in with a knife?"

"Did you see one?"

He shook his head. "No. Wasn't no knife there that I saw."

"You're sure she was alive then, when you got the clip?"

Steve's egg-shaped head nodded up and down.

The telephone on the Chief Constable's desk rang. He took up the receiver.

"He's here now," he said, after a moment. "I see."

He listened, making squares and circles on the desk pad.

"His hotel, I should think. Try it."

He put down the receiver, looked at Mr. Pinkerton, then at Bull.

"Weaver's lost Read," he said shortly.

Mr. Pinkerton's heart beat still more rapidly.

"Lost him on the cliff above Black Rock, after he came out of Arundel Mews . . . with your friend Mr. Pinkerton."

Of course, Mr. Pinkerton thought mechanically, they would shadow Andrew Read after they'd let him go. A babe in arms would have known that. Thousands of people who had never openly boasted of a friend at Scotland Yard would have known it. And he, Mr. Evan Pinkerton, had let Andy Read walk directly into a trap.

"Oh dear!" he thought. He glanced covertly at Bull. It seemed to him as if Bull almost definitely avoided looking at him.

If he could only know, Mr. Pinkerton thought wretchedly, what it was that Andy Read had seen through the library window. It was plainly something pretty awful, of course, to make him barge off alone into the night. Mr. Pinkerton's narrow celluloid collar seemed very tight suddenly, the Chief Constable's room intolerably stuffy. They called the cliff there Suicide Corner, he thought abruptly. What if . . . ? He shivered there in the hot close room. Could Andy Read, desperate for some reason that Mr. Pinkerton could not even guess at, connected with whatever it could have been that he had seen through the tiny chink in the library window out there at Sussex Square, have thrown himself off, dashed himself to destruction and oblivion on the concrete walk at the bottom of the cliff? He shivered again. Still, it seemed hardly conceivable.

Bull nodded to the constable who had been taking down Steve Burkett's story. "Get Colonel Isom on the line. Tell him we'll be along in a few moments. Take that story to Dr. Thurston. Ask him to look at it. See if that fits in with the idea of a stroke."

CHAPTER XXI

THERE was no long wait this time at the Isoms' door when Inspector Bull pushed the bell. The butler Noakes had it open almost before the sound, reverberating through the silent house, had died away. He stood aside.

"Colonel Isom is in the library, sir."

He took Bull's hat, letting Mr. Pinkerton manage his as best he could. They followed upstairs. Mr. Pinkerton peered about furtively, at closed doors leading to other silent rooms, hoping against hope that Linda Farrell's bright head would pop out of one and he could say something to her. He had no very clear idea of what it would be. Perhaps just the sight of her was all he wanted, really; that and the assurance that she was not . . . was not playing fast and loose with Andy Read. But all the polished mahogany doors he passed or could see remained as they were, solidly closed and impenetrable.

Colonel Isom was sitting in the big semicircular library. The blue curtains were drawn against the night. Mr. Pinkerton glanced cautiously, unobtrusively, at somewhere near the spot that Andy Read would have been looking through. It was plainly where the velvet had caught on the bolt so that it made a small uncovered square. He edged a step toward it, trying to make out what Read's line of vision could have included.

It included practically the entire room, he decided; at least a jolly good bit of it. The sofa he had hidden behind, for instance; the chairs, the fireplace, the door.

He tried feverishly to imagine what could have happened, and started as he realized the others were speaking.

"Sit down, Inspector," Colonel Isom said thickly. He did not raise his gaunt hollow-eyed face. "Who killed my wife? Who took her money?"

"We're trying to find out, Colonel Isom," Inspector Bull said soberly.

"You never will. You're a mouldy lot. Might as well give up—ha, ha, ha!"

"Why do you——"

"Why think that? Probably got the money yourselves. That fellow there!"

Mr. Pinkerton, his eyes bulging out of his skull, saw Colonel Isom's shaking forefinger raised, pointing menacingly, not at Inspector Bull or—worse still—at himself, but at a perfectly blank space against the wall.

"Why don't you own up?" Colonel Isom demanded angrily. "He won't answer. Been standing there hours. Never opens his ruddy head. He knows I know he's got it. And I'll get it—mark you me: I'll get it. Ha, ha, ha!"

Colonel Isom made a move to rise and sank back abruptly. A decanter, three-fourths empty, that had been concealed at his feet, turned over. The stopper rolled out, a pungently oily smell of brandy filled the room. It had not occurred to Mr. Pinkerton, shaking with fright, that there was such a simple explanation of Colonel Isom's delusion. He did remember, now, what Nurse Jessop had told him.

"I don't care. Let him take the money," Colonel Isom said thickly. "I want peace! Rita! Rita!"

Mr. Pinkerton thought quickly. His wife's name was Marie Louise, Miss Arnold's Amelia, Miss Farrell's Linda. Then he remembered Mr. Sellers in the Brighton Pavilion. That was what he had called the yellow-haired nurse.

"Rita!" said Colonel Isom. He stared blankly round the room. "Where's she gone? Tell her I want her. Tell her I won't make any trouble."

He clutched at his waistcoat. "Where's my eyeglass? Tell somebody find my eyeglass!"

Inspector Bull put out a hand toward the velvet bell-pull and tugged it. It seemed to Mr. Pinkerton, considering the time it had taken for Noakes to answer when he had pulled the bell a few hours earlier, that he must have started this time from much closer to the door.

"Tell Nurse Jessop Colonel Isom would like her to come here," Bull said. "Find his eyeglass. And take this."

He picked up the decanter, nearly empty, and handed it over.

"Very good, sir."

Noakes closed the door.

"Very good indeed," said Colonel Isom. "Tomorrow will have a clean sweep. New broom sweeps clean. I'm a new broom. I sweep a swean cleep."

He raised an imperative hand.

"Linda, Arnold, Sellers—all of 'em to be swept out. Rita's going stay and help sweep."

He reached nervous futile fingers into his waistcoat-pocket again, and shook his head irritably.

"Like to offer you gentlemen a drink." His eyes rested on each of them courteously. "Don't serve intoxicants in this house. A bit of sherry, perhaps. What's a bit of sherry? Or brandy in the Christmas pudding."

Colonel Isom's voice was evidently mocking his late wife's.

"Come round have bit of Christmas pudding. Or a bit of biscuit and a sherry. Oh, God!"

He groaned and dropped his head in his hands. "Rita!" he said thickly. "Where's Rita, damn it?"

Mr. Pinkerton stared, open-mouthed. Inspector Bull watched stolidly, his face expressionless as ever. Mr. Pinkerton saw him glance at the door before the handle turned. He thought, as he often had, how alert Bull's senses were behind the heavily deceptive façade.

Noakes came in.

"I beg pardon, sir. Nurse is not in her room. I will see if she is downstairs, sir."

He closed the door. Colonel Isom passed his hand across his narrow forehead. "Good chap, good chap," he said. "Never about when you don't want him—ha, ha, ha!"

He groaned again.

"What is this about your wife having a detective to shadow Nurse Jessop, Colonel Isom?" Bull asked.

Mr. Pinkerton drew in his breath sharply.

Colonel Isom shook his head back and forth for some time.

"Suspicious," he said at last. "Always suspicious. ~~Suspicious of everybody!~~ But she was wrong—ha, ha, ha! 'Detective came to me and said, 'Look here, old boy, I'm supposed find somebody and Sellers, instead I find somebody and you, what'll I do?' Ha, ha!"

He dropped one hand, groped about on the floor for the decanter, gave up and went on.

"I said report on somebody and Sellers of course, silly ass. Just what Marie wanted. Never wanted to believe anything against her beautiful boy. Mouldy ass, what?"

Bull watched him soberly.

"Paid detective fellow pots of money."

"Why, Colonel Isom?"

"Why, indeed. Let her get the wind up and send Rita away? Cut off my paltry shillings? Ha, ha, ha! And you a policeman. No wonder can't find anything. Ha, ha!"

He reached down again for the decanter.

"I see," Bull said.

Mr. Pinkerton, for some reason that he did not understand, felt a cold shadow fall across his heart.

Colonel Isom groped silently for the decanter, a look of such hurt bewilderment on his face that Mr. Pinkerton was very glad when Noakes opened the door.

"Nurse must have stepped out, sir. She doesn't appear to be downstairs."

"Where are the other ladies?" Bull asked.

"Retired, sir."

Noakes glanced discreetly, with slightly raised eyebrows, at the tall clock in the corner. The hands stood at 11.15. Mr. Pinkerton, following his glance, realized with a start of utter incredulity that it was exactly twelve hours, virtually to the minute, no more and no less, since he had met Mr. Harris in the Royal Kitchen of the Brighton Pavilion that morning, some thirty minutes before he had come on the dead body of Marie Louise Isom.

"Some time ago, sir," the butler went on, "by the doctor's orders. It's been a very trying day, if I may say so, sir."

Colonel Isom cackled suddenly.

"And don't tell him fetch Arnold down, in crimpers and cold cream," he mumbled. He raised himself in his chair. "Nobody but old maid would dare go to bed like oiled mummy."

Mr. Pinkerton frowned. The whole scene was distasteful to him, but he particularly disliked hearing the woman who could assist two lovers in distress, and quote *Dover Beach*, compared to an oiled mummy.

Colonel Isom sank heavily back.

"Where is Mr. Sellers?" Bull asked quietly.

"He stepped out for a bit of air, sir," Noakes replied. He cast a barely perceptible glance at Colonel Isom.

Bull looked at his watch, and down at the man in the chair. He had lapsed into sleep, his chin forward on his chest, snoring.

Noakes took a plaid rug off the arm of the sofa and put it over him.

"Why don't you put him to bed?" Bull asked.

"The Colonel retires at two, sir. He doesn't sleep well if he goes to bed earlier."

Mr. Pinkerton noticed, or thought he noticed, a momentary flicker in the butler's eyes.

"Is there anything else, sir?"

"Do you stay up till two to put him to bed?"

"No, sir. Madam allowed me to retire at eleven, and wake up just before two."

"You don't stay up till every one is in, then?"

"Mr. Sellers and Nurse Jessop have latch keys, sir. Miss Farrell and Miss Arnold were not permitted out after ten."

"And the Colonel? Was he permitted a key?"

"No, sir," Noakes said politely. "I believe he has one, however. In fact, perhaps I should admit that I had it made for him, at his urgent request, and without Madam's knowledge, sir."

Mr. Pinkerton followed Bull downstairs. Noakes stood at the door, holding it open for them. He closed it quietly. Mr. Pinkerton, standing there in the cool night, turned back toward the house, suddenly and involuntarily . . . as if he had had some anxious forewarning that he should not leave it; knew, in some way, that the pitchy shadow of murder still hung over it.

"Come along," Bull said. He crossed the narrow drive, Mr. Pinkerton following closely, and stood a moment at the iron fence enclosing the gardens of the square. Mr. Pinkerton heard a rustling in the shrubbery. A man's voice spoke in low tones.

"Sellers came out. The nurse joined him at the corner. They went off together."

"You didn't follow them?"

"No, sir. Inspector Johnson told me to keep an eye on the house."

Mr. Pinkerton was surprised at the sharp sudden breath that Bull inhaled. He knew from long experience that it was the equivalent, with Bull, of five minutes' sound and profane berating from a person like Superintendent Miller of Scotland Yard. It indicated a colossally unfortunate blunder.

"Anything else?"

"A man came out on the balcony and watched them a second."

"Who was it?"

"Couldn't make out, sir."

"Sure it was a man?"

The low voice hesitated. "It was very dark. I thought it was a man, Inspector. I spotted the other two by the street light when they came out."

Bull went on, Mr. Pinkerton at his heels.

"Should he have followed them?" he asked breathlessly.

"He followed orders," Bull said. He went on. Mr. Pinkerton held his peace. He would have liked very much to know who Bull thought it was on the balcony spying on Nurse Jessop and Quentin Sellers. It could not have been Colonel Isom, because, among other reasons, he did not know she was out. Or Noakes, unless, indeed, he was only pretending to hunt for her in the first place, or had known she was out but thought she might have come back. Noakes of course had known Sellers was not in.

They rounded Lewes Crescent and went along Arundel Terrace to the entrance from King's Cliff. To their right the brilliantly lighted thoroughfare stretched on until it was diffused in the myriad multi-coloured glow of the town. To their left the Downs and cliffs, empty and dark except for the vague brilliance of the night, after their eyes had forgotten the white lights of Brighton. The waves were beating slowly against the sea wall below. A hooter sounded somewhere along the road, a bird cried out in the black night.

Inspector Bull stood for a moment at the corner, looked at his watch again, and yawned.

"Are you going in to the town?" Mr. Pinkerton asked meekly.

Bull nodded.

"I'm going to turn in. There's nothing I can do out

here. Yates will let us know when they come in—I don't like it, but there's nothing to do."

Mr. Pinkerton hesitated. He felt again the same sudden premonition that he had felt just as they were leaving the Isom house. He shook his head with annoyance. Such inexplicable fears, he knew, were easily explained. Nevertheless his hands were quite cold.

He tried to think of something else. "Do you suppose they . . . they're deceiving Colonel Isom?" he asked, trying not to let Bull see that that was not really what he wanted to say . . . or see at the same time how inordinately curious he really was about it.

"It looks a bit shoddy," Bull said.

He opened the door of the police car at the kerb. Mr. Pinkerton hesitated again, and did something very bold, for him.

"I . . . I think I'll not go back, just yet," he said. "If you don't mind."

Bull stared, hesitated, and finally smiled faintly.

"Suit yourself. Try and keep out of trouble," he said dryly. He slammed the car door. "Read's probably home in his bed by this time. Good night."

Mr. Pinkerton stood on the kerb, blinking watery grey eyes after him until the red tail light had disappeared down the road. He adjusted his steel-rimmed spectacles carefully, straightened his narrow purple string tie and set off up the old meadow road that still extends, hard and broken among the encroaching grasses, a short distance along the cliff. He walked by the stout seven-strand wire barrier, just there by the cliff's edge at Suicide Corner, where the undercliff road comes up to the top at Black Rock.

The steady rhythmic crashing of the pebbles against the sea wall came up from below him. Somewhere off to his left, some distance away, he could hear a man's footsteps on the hard surface of the road. He came to the bench where he and Amelia Arnold had been, and

sat down. There was something rather pleasant about just sitting there, remembering how he had been moved to quote the poem that half an hour before he would never have dreamed he could remember . . . and how she had carried on, completing it, sharing his mood, understanding it.

He sat there dreaming beside the sea at midnight. A piece of paper on the grass under the green bench struck his eye, gleaming faintly in the dark. He prodded it with his foot. It was not paper at all, he saw, but a bit of cloth. He bent down and picked it up—a dainty white lawn handkerchief, rumpled, smelling faintly of lavender.

It was Amelia Arnold's, of course. He knew that with a sort of happy conviction. Glancing surreptitiously over his shoulder, along the cliff to each side of him, he folded it and put it in his inside waistcoat-pocket, next to where his emergency five-pound note was sewed. For some reason his pocket felt curiously warmer. Mr. Pinkerton blinked, happily aware that by the simple act of screwing up his courage to tell Bull he was not going back to the hotel just then, he had acquired for himself a frail bit of private personal life. After all, he and Amelia Arnold were fellow conspirators in the *Affaire Farrell*. They both knew *Dover Beach*. Mr. Pinkerton would have been willing, almost, to wager the five-pound note that Nurse Jessop did not even know there had ever been such a poem.

He got up, took a deep satisfying breath of the cool sea air and walked along the cliff. Even at such a time, he liked being alone—for the first time he could remember since that day he had first sat in the empty stuffiness of the house in Golders Green, its sole proprietor, occupant and staff.

He walked on, to where the wire barrier came to an end. There was no sound but the sea, and a dog baying up somewhere on the Downs; no living creature visible

but himself. There was no way for him to have known that only an hour before another figure had gone silently along just where he was, slipping along the side of the road, stopping dead still in fearful apprehension, watching with horror lurking behind a mask as drawn and waxen as death lest someone should come, hurrying silently on.

For some curious reason Mr. Pinkerton stopped short. The windmill on the Downs held its black arms up against a luminous sky. It was strangely eerie, he thought, staring up at it. Beyond the road there would be the motor caravans, their occupants asleep for the night, and beyond them were sleeping villages: Roedean, Saltdean, Rottingdean.

Suddenly he heard a sharp sound, and another; the scurrying of feet striking rapidly on the concrete stairs leading down the cliff. As he stared, a man and a girl rushed up over the top, saw him there and stopped. The girl was crying, the man had one arm about her. She broke away and ran, sobbing hysterically. The man pointed down the steps behind him.

"Down there—good God!" he gasped. He ran after the girl.

Mr. Pinkerton looked about him, moistening his suddenly dry lips. No one was in sight except the two young people whom he could still hear, at any rate, running rapidly across the turf. He looked about again, crept then to the edge of the cliff and looked cautiously over the dark tufted edge, down the sheer white chalk precipice. He knelt there for a long time, dizzily, clutching desperately at the tough grass, his heart strangely dead.

Then he heard himself speaking aloud, very quietly. "I should have known it," he was saying, over and over to himself. It seemed minutes before he was able to move. A few steps took him to the concrete stairs. He went down them like a man in a dream, his feet resounding loudly on the white concrete until they

must have echoed, he thought, against the green-topped roof of the race-course stands on the Downs.

At the bottom he turned sharply right and ran along the concrete path at the top of the sea wall.

"I should have known it," he kept saying breathlessly. The words beat in his throat, choking him. He fought desperately for breath as he ran. The body was plainly visible there in front of him, a dark inert heap lying there at the bottom, broken and horribly still.

"Andy!" Mr. Pinkerton cried. "Andy!"

He knelt down, touched the dark wool of the coat, and stopped motionless, his heart frozen in his mouth, shaking with terror. Lying there utterly still and dead, a huddled mass, and quite cold, was . . . not Andy Read.

Mr. Pinkerton's hands shook dreadfully as he moved the coat to see. He held it lifted there, staring. Staring back up at him against the white concrete lay a blonde girl. For a long time his brain kept repeating her name, again and again, before he could believe actually that it was Nurse Jessop's dead face there, looking past him into eternity.

Then, as he moved involuntarily, his foot struck something under the dark cloak with a grating noise. He looked down. It was broken glass. He saw that one of Nurse Jessop's dead hands was clutching a long black cord. On the end of it was all that was left of a single broken eyeglass.

CHAPTER XXII

How long Mr. Pinkerton squatted there, staring at Nurse Jessop's fixed dead eyes, he could never have told. When he first heard feet beating sharply on the stone walk he could not have told either. He only knew that he crouched there dumbly until he was aware suddenly that someone was coming toward him, that he had been coming for a long time, that there was something vaguely familiar about his steps.

He looked up. The figure of a very tall man loomed against the background of the chalk cliff, eerily white in the darkness. It stopped, then approached slowly, as if afraid to come, to see what was lying there on the concrete walk.

Mr. Pinkerton managed to get to his feet. He felt old and helpless. The man came closer.

"I . . . I was afraid it was you," Mr. Pinkerton whispered.

"Afraid what was me?" Andy Read said.

Mr. Pinkerton realized then that he had not yet seen what had happened. "Her," he said. He pointed down to the huddled mass under the dark coat.

Andy Read took a step forward. "Good God!" he said. Mr. Pinkerton, staring curiously at him, thought he could see his face go suddenly as white as the chalk of the cliff behind him.

"Not Linda?" Andy Read said huskily.

He took two steps forward and knelt beside the crushed body. Mr. Pinkerton understood why he had asked that. All that was visible of Nurse Jessop was her bleached hair, and Linda Farrell's hair was gold when the sun was not on it. He knew too that fear lives close to love in people's hearts. The odd thought came to

him, standing there, with the pebbles crashing in steadily, rhythmically, against the wall at his feet and the great cliff towering up behind him into the luminous darkness of the night, that he had once been afraid for the late Mrs. Pinkerton to stay alone in the house at night, when he had had to go to his aunt's in Caerphilly. Thinking of it, he could either have wept or giggled with equal ease. It had been very silly indeed. Mrs. Pinkerton, as it turned out, had been more than a match for any pestilence that walketh in darkness, being in her own right a destruction that wasteth at noonday.

This was not the same, of course.

Andy Read was on his knees, staring now just as Mr. Pinkerton had done. His long, rugged face, oddly good-looking in spite of its angular unhandsomeness, had changed quickly. Horror and pity were on it, not the first poignant dread. He recoiled suddenly, dropped the coat, shuddering, and got up.

"I never thought she had it in her," he said quietly.

"What . . . what do you mean?"

"I didn't think she had guts enough, to finish the job . . . like this."

Mr. Pinkerton blinked. The implication was not only clear. It was obvious. It was all quite simple, really . . . and what everybody would think. Nurse Jessop had killed Mrs. Isom, and in a fit of remorse, or more likely knowing Inspector Bull was close behind her, had chosen the easy way out. Mr. Pinkerton thought quickly over Steve Burkett's story. There could easily have been things that Steve had not seen, being occupied chiefly with getting the dead woman's brooch and getting away. He looked down again at the huddled shapeless figure, and at Andy Read.

The American was staring up at the white cliff, the seventy-five feet, or was it more, Mr. Pinkerton wondered, that she had plunged down on to the concrete walk.

A little terrified and more than a little puzzled, Mr. Pinkerton shook his head. Andy Read had not seen the shattered eyeglass, or the black cord, in her hand. If he had . . . Mr. Pinkerton wondered. But no one save himself had seen it. If Inspector Bull did not see it, then no one would guess that this was anything but suicide. Many people committed suicide by throwing themselves over this cliff. The part down below him, at Black Rock, was even called Suicide Corner; someone had thrown himself over that very morning. In Mr. Pinkerton's weary mind a dreadful procession of people moved despondently up to the cliff's edge and flung themselves headlong. Sheep jumping a fence were not more obliging than these wraiths assisting the grey little man with his sudden mad notion.

"Look!" Andy Read said. He shook himself out of the trance that they were both in, each moving quite separately from the other. "You go call the police."

Mr. Pinkerton moistened his lips. "No," he said firmly. "You go—do you mind? The . . . the steps are hard on my heart."

His heart stood still at the calumny, and beat again, rapidly, as Andy nodded.

"O.K.," he said.

Mr. Pinkerton heard his long quick strides on the walk, and on the steps four at a time.

He knelt down beside the dead woman again. With only the briefest glance behind him he disengaged the black cord from her hand and put it in his pocket, with what remained of the bit of glass to which it had been attached.

He often woke up at night, for months afterward, wondering why he had done that, why it had seemed so important to him, just then, that Nurse Jessop should be thought a suicide. If the monocle had been Andrew Read's, he thought, there might have been some point in it. But why he, who had always hunted with the

hounds—if indeed Inspector Bull could properly be called that—should suddenly start covering trails for the hare, he had not the remotest idea. Not, really, until much later. All he knew then was that as he put the black silk cord in his pocket he was in a sense putting it about his own neck . . . knotting it, handing the end over to the hare to pull. Thinking about that, weeks later, he would turn quite cold and get up to switch on the light. It was rather more uncomfortable still to realize, even long afterward, how near he had come, at just that moment, to joining Mrs. Pinkerton and his old Welsh aunts in glory; nearer than he cared to admit to anybody . . . even himself if he could keep from it.

The red-enamelled nails of Nurse Jessop looked incredibly grotesque, even there in the luminous night. Dark spots on the waxen finger-tips. He tried not to touch her as he disengaged the cord.

When he had stowed it safely in his waistcoat pocket, he cleaned up the shattered bits of glass as well as he could, crossed the narrow walk, sat down on the low wall and looked out at the sea. For a moment he thought of throwing the cord out into the waves. It was safer as it was. The waves would bring it up, one of the numerous beach-combers who search the sands for lost money and bits of jewellery would be sure to find it. They would never look in his pockets. Not even Inspector Bull would be as clever as that.

He was sitting there fifteen minutes later when he heard the sound of a motor far above him. Two broad white fingers of light reached blindly over the cliff. He looked up. They were coming down the stone stairs, square figures outlined against the chalk. Quite suddenly and keenly Mr. Pinkerton realized the enormity of what he had done. In another moment or two, unless he put the eyeglass and cord back into the dead woman's hand, he would be definitely, in a manner of speaking at least, an accessory after the fact. For

there was no doubt at all in his mind that Nurse Jessop had not fallen, or thrown herself, off the cliff above. She had most plainly been pushed off. It was not suicide; it was murder: the second murder, he thought, hardly believing it, that had taken place that very day, in Brighton, in the immediate circle of the Isom family. It was not, as Andy Read had thought, and as everybody would now think, a guilty conscience that had driven the yellow-haired nurse over. It was most certainly the same guilty hand that had struck down the old woman in the Music Room of the Brighton Pavilion.

"I shouldn't do this . . . it's very wrong," he told himself desperately. "I'll be pariah. They'll never let me come near Scotland Yard again."

His shaking hand in his pocket closed, opened, closed on the black silk cord. The heavy steps came nearer. Electric torches flashed. Mr. Pinkerton blinked, swallowed, and did nothing.

It was too late then. Inspector Bull, Inspector Johnson of the Brighton Constabulary and two men he had not seen before were there, bending over the body. The die was cast. *Alea*, Mr. Pinkerton thought wretchedly, *jacta erat*. What was done was done; it was for ever and for ever too late to do anything else. All he could do now was try desperately not to look as if he had pushed Nurse Jessop off the cliff himself . . . and that, he thought, must be exactly what he was looking like at the present moment. He was very grateful that it was dark.

They were a long time over the body lying there so motionless . . . far longer, Mr. Pinkerton thought, than he had ever seen the police before at such a time. Then Bull and Inspector Johnson stepped off to one side and held a short conference in low tones. Bull came back to the others by Nurse Jessop's body.

"We'll want photographs of this," he said.

One of the other men got up. Mr. Pinkerton realized that he was the police surgeon.

"Plain as a pikestaff," he said. "I've told you forty times you ought to put nets along the cliff. Or get a special suicide squad. Do you realize this is the second suicide to-day?"

He stepped back, wiping his hands on a handkerchief. Torches flashed again, on the body, on the walk round it. Mr. Pinkerton trembled uncontrollably. He knew very well from long experience how difficult it is—how impossible, rather—to cover things up. They can always tell, he thought miserably; always, always.

They moved the body at last, a slow procession up the stairs in the darkness. Mr. Pinkerton saw Andy Read moving slowly after them. He was puzzled. What did the lanky young man think he was doing? He looked at Bull and Inspector Johnson. There was no indication from them that they thought anything of it. Mr. Pinkerton said nothing.

Bull took out his note-book and held his torch on it.

"Read says you were here when he came along?" he asked.

Mr. Pinkerton told them about the young couple who had dashed hysterically up the steps. Inspector Johnson grunted.

"Description," he said.

Mr. Pinkerton looked apprehensively at Bull, took off his new brown bowler and mopped his grey forehead.

"I . . . I'm sure I don't know what they looked like at all," he stammered. "It was very dark, of course. They were most excited. The girl was hysterical. The man could hardly talk. I should think he was about thirty and the girl quite a bit younger. I just gathered there was something down here and that it was pretty awful. I . . . I assumed somebody had . . . fallen over. Or jumped over, of course."

He trusted that his hesitation there had not been noticed.

"So . . . I crawled to the edge and looked down. I could see something here."

Inspector Johnson grunted again. "You don't recall what they looked like, or were wearing?"

"I'm sorry," Mr. Pinkerton mumbled. "I . . . the man wore a soft hat, I think."

"Sure there were two such people?"

Mr. Pinkerton stammered indignantly. "Oh . . . certainly," he managed to get out. "I saw them very distinctly. They headed for the meadow there, where all the caravans are parked."

Johnson nodded. "No doubt in Berwick-on-Tweed by now," he said. His voice was pointed with sarcasm and doubt. Mr. Pinkerton flushed. He did not, he now fully recognized, like Inspector Johnson of the Brighton Constabulary, nor had he ever liked him.

He adjusted his lozenge-shaped spectacles. He steadfastly resisted the temptation to look at Bull, realizing now almost poignantly that he was being perfidious, and there was no other word for it, to the only friend he had in the world.

He could scarcely believe his ears when Bull said quietly, "I'll vouch for Mr. Pinkerton. He was with me this evening. Her watch is stopped at 10.33. Pinkerton was with me then."

Inspector Johnson's voice was much more polite. "That's all right," he said quickly. "It wouldn't be the first time a watch had been set back, however."

Mr. Pinkerton knew even without looking that his large friend would be nodding soberly.

"I know," Bull said. "The surgeon says she's been dead at least two hours, probably longer. It's 12.18 now. Pinkerton was with me from 9.42 to 11.50 or so."

Mr. Pinkerton adjusted his spectacles again, rather primly, and allowed himself a smile. He felt considerable satisfaction. It was the first time, of all his many unfortunate stumblings about on to dead bodies, that he had been given a first-rate, water-tight alibi, and by a leading member of New Scotland Yard. He wondered vaguely if he had ever before had any sort

of an alibi. Certainly this was the first time that Inspector Bull had established one for him, and with that stolid infinitely respectable placidity of his.

His satisfaction was very short-lived, however.

"At any rate," Bull went on, "he'll be available if you want to question him at any time."

In the dark Mr. Pinkerton could feel the mild blue gaze resting on him.

"He'll be along with me from now on."

Mr. Pinkerton winced. There was something ominous in that remark. He thought of the black silk cord in his pocket.

"Oh dear!" he thought miserably. "Why did I do it? Why am I always such a . . . such an incredible ass?"

Inspector Johnson's tones were quite falsely hearty. "Oh, I know Mr. Pinkerton had nothing to do with it. Just a matter of routine."

Mr. Pinkerton tried to smile, and did smile, just as falsely. Inspector Bull did not bother. He was looking down at the place where Nurse Jessop's body had been. The torch moved slowly from place to place. He bent down. Mr. Pinkerton's heart chilled. He knew what was happening without even looking. Try as he would, of course, it was hopeless to think he would have been able to pick up all the tiny splinters.

Inspector Johnson looked down too. "Broken glass," he said. "Her watch glass was smashed, of course."

Bull nodded. Mr. Pinkerton felt an odd mixture of emotions. It was all good, it was very good, and yet . . . His heart rose buoyantly, and sank instantly. Poor old Bull. Losing his grip, rapidly.

"Oh dear!" Mr. Pinkerton thought. "What a . . . what a *cad* I've turned out to be!"

Bull got heavily to his feet. "You'd better have a man here to-night," he said. "I want to have another look at this place in the morning."

He stepped back and looked up at the white cliff a

long time. What he was thinking appeared satisfactory, for he set out then, Inspector Johnson and the little man following, up the steps and back over the dry turf to where Mr. Pinkerton had peered in horror over the edge.

“This will be about it,” he said. “Have a man put here too, Inspector.”

He turned the powerful white beam on the grass. None of them spoke. The moving ball of light seemed the only thing alive there. But Mr. Pinkerton, following it intently, could see where the thin layer of soil on the edge, between the turf and the white chalk, had been broken down.

CHAPTER XXIII

FOR the fourth time since he had arrived in Brighton that afternoon, Mr. Pinkerton stood in front of the Isom house in Sussex Square. Inspector Bull and Inspector Johnson listened silently as the man who had been behind the rhododendrons in the enclosed garden reported tersely from his note-book. Mr. Pinkerton, more tired than he had ever been in his life, listened too.

A tall gentleman without a hat and he himself, Mr. Evan Pinkerton, he heard mechanically, had come to the house at 9.20, and had rung the bell for a total of eight minutes before the butler had answered. They were inside six minutes, had come out then and disappeared into Lewes Crescent. Mr. Quentin Sellers had come out at 9.42. The lady came out at 9.43. Someone had then appeared on the balcony at 9.43. Sellers had returned at 10.21. Inspector Bull entered the house, also with Mr. Pinkerton, at 10.51, and had come out at 11.18. A tall man without a hat had appeared at 12.24 and had rung the bell, and was inside at the present moment.

"You're sure you got all of them?"

"Right, sir."

There was no long doubt as to who the last tall man without a hat was, if indeed there had been any doubt in anybody's mind. Mr. Andy Read was in the hall in violent altercation with the butler, who opened the door as they rang. Noakes was in nightshirt, trousers and slippers. Mr. Pinkerton could hear Read's angry voice as they came in: "... there they are now, you bloody fool——"

He stopped abruptly and glowered at the three of them.

Bull glanced queerly at him, hesitated, and spoke to the butler. "I want to see Mr. Sellers."

"Very good, sir."

Mr. Pinkerton noticed that Noakes seemed to have undergone a change, in spite of his suavity and aplomb. He gave the appearance of having shrunk. His face with its oddly protruding eyes was not white, it was yellow.

"If you'll wait here, sir."

He indicated the small reception-room where Mr. Pinkerton and Andy Read had waited.

"We'll go upstairs," Bull said. He started up. Mr. Pinkerton scurried after. Inspector Johnson followed. Noakes, hesitating a moment, came at the rear. Read stood, grim-faced, in the hall. Mr. Pinkerton gave him a furtive nod to follow, but he shook his head.

Bull opened the library door. Colonel Isom was in the chair where they had left him, snoring gently, still fast asleep.

"I'll call Mr. Sellers, sir."

Noakes moved silently away. Mr. Pinkerton saw him start as he saw that Inspector Johnson was following him.

Bull did not wake Colonel Isom, as Mr. Pinkerton had thought he would do. He closed the door and crossed the room quickly. It was then that Mr. Pinkerton first noticed that the chink in the curtain where Andy Read had looked in was no longer there. To his surprise, Bull made directly for that very spot and stopped, looking from window to floor and back.

Mr. Pinkerton looked, largely because he was uncomfortable watching Bull, at the sleeping man. He blinked rapidly. It seemed entirely incredible, but he saw, or thought he saw, the light reflected in two intensely bright and alert slits under Colonel Isom's light eyelashes.

He looked hastily away, adjusting his spectacles. Colonel Isom snored gently. Not so regularly, or so

loudly, as when they had been there before, but certainly very naturally, Mr. Pinkerton thought—as one sleeping soundly, and being gradually awakened by a subconscious knowledge of other persons in the room, would snore. Still, it was disconcerting. Mr. Pinkerton turned, as if nothing of the sort had happened, and strolled over to a mirror above a gilt Louis XVI console near the door. By pretending to examine a bowl on the table he could keep the tail of his eye fastened on the sleeping man reflected in the mirror.

Colonel Isom did not move. "I must have been seeing things," the little man thought. He was also, he realized, not seeing what Bull was doing, which of course would have been more to the point.

Suddenly Bull was back near the door, and Noakes entered the room, alone.

"Mr. Sellers will be down directly, sir. The other police gentleman is with him."

He stood there for an instant. "I beg pardon, sir. Is it true that Nurse Jessop has . . . has had an accident, sir?"

"Yes," Bull said. "I'm afraid she did. She fell off the cliff and is dead."

"The American gentleman said so, sir, but I . . . I can't bring myself to believe it."

Mr. Pinkerton looked in his mirror. Colonel Isom was sleeping calmly, breathing regularly.

Noakes glanced at him. "Would you like him to wake up, sir?"

He touched him on the shoulder.

Colonel Isom started. "What . . . what's that?" he said sharply. His eyes moved round the room.

"Wake up, sir," the butler said.

"Wake up, confound you?" Colonel Isom said thickly. "I *am* awake, damn your impudence. I've not been asleep."

He nodded gravely to Inspector Bull.

"You were saying, what did I pay the detective chap

for. I'll tell you. If that chap had gone to my wife and said I'd been seen with somebody—ha, ha, ha!—there'd have been jolly hell to pay. Better pay *him*!”

Mr. Pinkerton stared at him open-mouthed in something like horror. It was dreadful to think how much had happened since that conversation had stopped. One hour's brandy-drugged oblivion for Colonel Isom had been an hour of mortal terror and death for the yellow-haired nurse lying only a moment ago at the bottom of the white wind-swept cliff.

Colonel Isom reached fumblingly for his decanter.

“Learned to sleep in the saddle,” he was saying. “In fact, got used to going without sleep. Two to six, plenty for any man. Where's a glass? Noakes, give these gentlemen a drink.”

The butler did not move. “Do you wish me to call Miss Arnold and Miss Linda, sir?”

Before Bull could speak Mr. Pinkerton heard Amelia Arnold on the stairs. “What is it, Mr. Sellers? Is the Colonel ill?”

Sellers's suave tones murmured.

“Oh, God, how terrible!” Miss Arnold gasped. She caught her breath sharply. “Have they told Linda?”

She came quickly into the room, brushing past Inspector Johnson and Sellers at the door, and came up to Bull.

“Don't, please don't tell Miss Farrell, not till morning, Inspector!”

Colonel Isom stared angrily at her. He looked angrily at Bull.

“What's wrong here?” he demanded. “Didn't I tell you a minute ago not to wake her up or she'd come down in crimpers?”

Amelia Arnold was not at her best at the moment, Mr. Pinkerton had to admit. Her hair was done up in curlers, an adhesive band held up her chin, and she did glisten with emollient cream. Mr. Pinkerton looked at Noakes. He was not at his best either, so far as that

went. Neither was Mr. Quentin Sellers, in striped pyjamas and a striped dressing-gown. His face, under a day's growth of beard, was drawn, haggard and white, and his hair was uncombed. In fact, Mr. Pinkerton decided, looking curiously at him, he was not as near his best as Miss Arnold, if only for the reason that her face at least showed the emotions of horror and distress, his only alarm and fear.

In any case, few people looked well when waked out of a sound sleep. Even Margaret Bull, who was about the prettiest woman Mr. Pinkerton knew, looked pretty dishevelled when her hair was not arranged and her face covered with cold cream. In fact, Mr. Pinkerton thought, it was decidedly to Amelia Arnold's credit that, knowing she was coming where a lot of men were, she had not thought of herself at all, but of Linda Farrell, and the ghastly horror of it.

"I say, Inspector," Sellers said. "This . . . this is pretty foul!"

He was more shaky than arrogant now, Mr. Pinkerton observed.

"It is, sir."

Colonel Isom stared. "*What* is foul?"

Sellers looked blankly at the policemen. "Good God, haven't you told him?"

Colonel Isom's sallow face turned red with fury.

"Told me *what*, damn you?" he shouted.

"Rita . . . Nurse Jessop—she's dead."

Colonel Isom was suddenly quiet. He said nothing and did nothing. There was no expression on his face. He was utterly quiescent, as if everything had stopped, and was not existing any more.

"She jumped over the cliff, killed herself."

Miss Amelia Arnold's voice sounded instantly. It was taut and bitter.

"That's ridiculous on the face of it!" she snapped. "If any one of you thinks Marguerite Jessop would so much as think of killing herself, then you're a pack of

simpletons. She was the last person in the world to take her own life."

She turned quickly to Mr. Pinkerton . . . of all people, as he instantly thought.

"*You're* not being fooled by such talk? You've talked with her—you know she wouldn't do such a thing!"

Mr. Pinkerton hastily adjusted his purple string tie, quite speechless. He tried not to look at Inspector Johnson or Inspector Bull. He hoped Bull would not think he had again pretended he was in charge of the case. He had done that once, quite inadvertently, with unfortunate results. He could still hear them calling him Superintendent Pinkerton and roaring with laughter. Superintendent Pinkerton of the Big Five.

Colonel Isom spoke with a dead choked voice. "You're right, Amelia. She'd never have done it. Not . . . not now. Not . . . just when happiness was before us."

Then Amelia Arnold did a strange and touching thing. She crossed the room suddenly, knelt by Colonel Isom's chair, took his long thin hand and patted it gently. "There, there, Horace," she said. "Don't . . . don't. She wouldn't have left you. Don't take it so terribly, Horace."

It was the first time that Mr. Pinkerton had thought what the relationship of these two must really be.

Colonel Isom clung to her hand. Then he sat up abruptly. "Where's Evill?"

Miss Arnold looked at the policemen, and at Sellers.

"Mr. Evill, sir?" Noakes said. "He's in bed. Shall I call him, sir?"

Isom's face darkened.

"Made it plain you were to get him out of this house," he shouted. "Not having that foxy stoat-faced weasel pawing about in my papers!"

"Get him, Noakes," Miss Arnold said. "Don't be a fool, Horace. He's your solicitor till you get a better, which shouldn't be hard to do."

She turned to Bull. "No doubt you have a few things to say."

Bull nodded. "Will you all give me a short account of where you spent the evening, please. Miss Arnold?"

Mr. Pinkerton listened avidly. Miss Arnold had taken to-morrow's list to the kitchen at half-past nine, and had gone to bed. She had heard someone in the library with Colonel Isom when she had got up to get a glass of water.

"Or rather, to be frank, I heard someone in here and got up to get a glass of water, thinking I might be able to find out who it was."

"Who was it?"

"You and Mr. Pinkerton. I heard you leave the house, and saw you talk——"

"Thank you," Bull said. "You went back to bed then?"

Amelia Arnold nodded, her bright eyes resting curiously on him for a moment. Mr. Pinkerton saw at once why Bull had interrupted her. He did not want everybody to know, of course, that there was a policeman in the square, stationed there to keep an eye on their goings and comings.

"And you, Mr. Sellers?"

Inspector Bull's voice was unchanged, but it did not take the look of interest on Inspector Johnson's face to tell Mr. Pinkerton that it was Mr. Quentin Sellers that they were chiefly interested in. He had been seen by Detective-Constable Yates leaving the Isom house, at 9.42. Nurse Jessop had then left it, a minute later; and Yates had seen them together, down toward the sea; and he was the only person so far known to have been with her that night.

Mr. Sellers, however, had read in the library till nine o'clock, had gone to his room, written a few letters, and gone to bed.

"You were not out of the house this evening, then?"

"That's stupid of me, Inspector. I did step out, for

about ten minutes, between nine and ten, to post my letters and get a bit of air before I turned in. Not more than ten minutes, and I should fancy less. I walked up to Bristol Street, round the square and back. Perhaps twelve minutes or so, but not more."

"You didn't see Nurse Jessop when you were out?"

"No, no. If I had done, she wouldn't have done this——"

"Rot!" Miss Arnold said.

Sellers turned to her, his face contorted with anger. "Amelia, I wish you'd mind your tongue!" he shouted. Mr. Pinkerton jumped violently. Sellers's face had gone from grey to white to red. He mastered himself with an effort.

"I'm sorry," he said shortly. "I'm a bit nervy."

"Afraid, Quentin?" Miss Arnold asked.

He flushed again, but was silent.

Inspector Bull's eyes moved from one to the other of them. He turned to Colonel Isom. "And you, sir? You have been here all evening?"

Isom nodded. "Haven't I, Noakes? I . . . I must have dropped off. No idea it was so late. Sure that clock's not been tampered with, Noakes?"

"Quite sure, sir."

"She used to tamper with it. Trying make me go to bed. . . . Wonder if it would be permissible for everybody have a little drink, Amelia? Feel . . . feel need of it."

Amelia Arnold glanced at Bull. He nodded. She nodded to Noakes. As he stepped into the hall she changed her mind. "I'll get it myself. You may be needed here."

"You didn't leave the house at any time, Colonel Isom?"

"No, no. Been here all the time . . . waiting."

Bull looked at the butler.

"I've been answering the door all the evening, sir."

"You've certainly not been doing anything else,"

Sellers remarked. There was a tone of annoyance in his voice. "No hot water in the rooms . . . in my room at any rate. The place has gone to pot."

"I'm sorry, sir," Noakes said.

"So that the first time you knew Nurse Jessop was not in the house——"

"I beg pardon, sir. I made no effort to find her then. She had said she did not wish to be disturbed. I didn't disturb her. So far as I knew, when I told you this evening she was not in her room, sir, she was in it to the best of my knowledge. I was merely following her specific instructions that when Colonel Isom began calling for her I was to say she was not in. I did not know, sir, that I was not telling an untruth."

"I see," Bull said. "Was it customary for Nurse Jessop not to come when she was wanted?"

Noakes hesitated. "It was my understanding, sir, that her position as attendant to Madam gave her duties a specific nature. Now that Madam is gone, she believed, I think, that she was no longer expected to be on call."

Inspector Bull nodded as if he understood perfectly. Mr. Pinkerton, certain that he would drop dead of fatigue at any moment, took off his lozenge-shaped spectacles and rubbed his eyes. His brain was whirling. It was all much too confusing. There was only one comforting thought. That was, that however stolid and respectable Inspector Bull's great red face might look, he missed nothing. These were exactly the kind of people, furthermore, that he knew through and through.

Then Mr. Pinkerton got the point. Nurse Jessop would have told Noakes that, of course, because she wanted badly to go out, and she did not want people—or Colonel Isom at any rate—to know she had gone.

CHAPTER XXIV

COLONEL ISOM had sat up suddenly as Noakes said that, his face white, his eyes glaring angrily. Mr. Pinkerton, seeing that savage stare fixed on the butler, expected something pretty dreadful. But at that moment Miss Arnold appeared at the door with a silver tray, a decanter, a siphon and half a dozen glasses.

Behind her was Mr. Marius Evill.

He was neatly got up in a perfectly pressed dove-grey flannel dressing-gown and a pair of grey leather slippers. He was smoking a cigarette, his hair was neatly combed and redolent of some kind of ferny dressing. If he was aware that Nurse Jessop had met a violent death, he was a man of the most stoical turn of mind, Mr. Pinkerton thought . . . at least where other people's misfortunes were concerned. It appeared, however, that he had not known it, having apparently just met Miss Arnold in the hall.

"Not . . . that charming girl?" he said slowly. The strawberry mark turned a deep purple. "Good God, Inspector. How incredible. Such a capable person. However, that settles everything, I imagine. I should never have thought of her as a murderess. I expect that much money is hard to resist. I . . . I certainly had no idea of frightening her when I told her. I felt it my duty to state the facts as I knew them."

"Told her *what*?" Colonel Isom demanded angrily.

Mr. Evill looked pained.

"As a matter of fact, I had told her, inadvertently, that I had a large sum of money with me. Early this morning, when I arrived. She asked me if I would like to breakfast here while Mrs. Isom was making her toilet. I had put my despatch-case on the table.

She moved it so that Noakes could put my tray there. I said, very foolishly—as I presume an old man is likely to act in front of a handsome young woman—I said, waggishly, ‘Careful of that, my dear, it’s got a king’s ransom in it.’ She said, ‘How important a king?’ or something of the sort. I told her I doubted if many kings nowadays were worth five thousand cash on the counter.”

Mr. Pinkerton noticed that Mr. Sellers, starting to light a cigarette, found his fingers trembling so badly that he gave it up and stood looking down at the floor, his hands thrust heavily into the pockets of his dressing-gown.

“Where have you been this evening, Mr. Evill?” Bull asked.

“In my room, Inspector.”

Evill looked across the room at Colonel Isom. “I’m fully aware, of course, of my equivocal position in this household since the death of its mistress. As I’m still in charge of the property, however, I feel it my duty to remain here till that property is properly settled.”

He looked round at Mr. Sellers. It was almost, if not quite, a look of challenge, Mr. Pinkerton thought.

“I mention that because it will explain why I retired to my room immediately after dinner, or very shortly after, instead of staying here with the others in the drawing-room. I needn’t tell you that my late client would not have approved of the things that are going on in this house.”

Mr. Pinkerton wondered what was going on, beyond Noakes’s so far unexplained failures. The idea of things in the house brought abruptly to his mind a vision of the tall, grim-lipped young man downstairs. Almost before the idea had flashed into his mind he edged to the door, slipped behind Inspector Johnson and, when nobody was looking, slipped out, in the midst of Colonel Isom’s angry mumblings. He nipped down the stairs.

The hall was quite empty. For a moment he thought Andy must have gone, though he couldn't imagine him doing it. Yet, when he came to think of it, what point was there, really, in his staying, or even in his being there at all? Wondering about that, Mr. Pinkerton crept on to the bottom of the stairs. As he reached the hall it seemed to him that he heard a small sound from the reception-room to his right. He looked back upstairs, and then quite shamelessly knelt down and peered in at the keyhole.

He stared open-mouthed. Perfectly visible in the little room were two figures, Andy Read and Linda Farrell. She was standing, crimson-cheeked and flashing-eyed, her back to the fireplace, and Andy Read had hold of her wrists. While Mr. Pinkerton watched breathlessly he jerked her roughly off her feet and sat her down violently on the yellow-backed satin sofa. Then, as Mr. Pinkerton watched, his eyes popping out of his head, he was on his knees ripping off the girl's shoes. Mr. Pinkerton blinked, rubbed his eyes, and stared in horror. Then, before he could begin to make up his mind what he should do, he heard Andy Read's voice, low and hard.

"Listen, you silly fool! I don't care who you marry. You can marry a Chinaman if you want to. But you're not going to hang for murder, not if I can stop you. Stand up. Get that dress off!"

Mr. Pinkerton moistened his lips. Wondering frantically what an elderly frail Welshman should be expected to do in such an emergency, he was heartened to see that Linda Farrell had no intention of doing anything of the sort.

He heard Read's voice again.

"Listen, kid—a pink slip's no treat to me. I've got four sisters and I've been to Paris. Take that off, and get these things on before I take it off you myself."

Linda Farrell's angry face crumpled, suddenly, like that of a child. Then she was actually . . . Mr.

Pinkerton jumped back so quickly that he lost his balance and sat down with a thud on his scrawny posterior in the middle of the hall. He scrambled to his feet, very glad the Isom rugs were so thick, and mopped the perspiration off his astonished little forehead.

A door opened upstairs. They would shortly be coming out of the library.

"Now get up there, and look sleepy, and say you've been in bed like all the rest of the damn liars."

Mr. Pinkerton dived for the Jacobean chair with the red velvet seat and crouched behind it. He peered cautiously out. Linda Farrell, dressed in a rumpled yellow nightgown and satin slippers and wearing a gold silk dressing-gown, padded across the hall, looking about ten years old. Read stood in the doorway looking critically after her. As she got to the bottom step he said, "Wait a minute."

Mr. Pinkerton's romantic heart quickened. She looked very sweet. He didn't blame Andy Read. But Read did not bend down suddenly, as strong men did in the pictures, and press his lips to hers with grimly restrained passion. He ripped his handkerchief out of his pocket and wiped it roughly across her mouth and over her face. Mr. Pinkerton, disappointed but acute, got the idea at once. The lip rouge she had worn was gone. The young man then rumpled her hair with both hands until it was a tangled mass of yellow-gold curls.

He stood back and looked at her. "Git!" he said curtly. "Make it snappy!"

Mr. Pinkerton sank back, and took a deep breath. He could hear Linda padding softly upstairs. He heard Andy Read go back into the little reception-room and come out again. Mr. Pinkerton peered round his chair. Read had a small bundle of clothes. He crossed the hall with a swift stride, opened the chest under the stairs, thrust the clothes in it. In another instant the front door closed softly behind him.

Mr. Pinkerton got up stiffly, his knees, virtually immovable with exhaustion, cracking violently in the still hall.

He shook his head primly. "Young people," he thought, "are really very strange."

He went out to the foot of the stairs. Above he could hear Linda's voice. "Whatever is the matter? Is . . . is someone ill?"

Mr. Pinkerton shook his head. "Artful!" he said to himself. He happened to catch a glimpse of himself in the mirror over against the wall. He was grinning like a silly old fool, and knew it.

Then—because he had never in his life let well enough alone, as he realized later, thinking it over—he crept to the chest and opened it. They were there, of course: Linda Farrell's frock, her shoes, her stockings, and some other things, done in an untidy bundle at the end of the chest. Then Mr. Pinkerton's grin faded sharply. There was something else there too. He stared at it for a long time before he picked it up. There was no question about what it was. It was the small black leather envelope with the patent fastener that Marie Louise Isom had clutched at with her helpless fingers that very morning. It had held, at that time, five thousand pounds, and it had disappeared when she was killed.

Mr. Pinkerton picked it up with trembling fingers. He knew without opening it that it was flat and empty. He put it carefully back and stood there for many minutes, thinking about a great many things. One of them was a question that kept coming back, forcing its unpleasant way into his brain: How had Andy Read known so surely where to stow Linda's clothes?

He let the top of the chest down and went slowly upstairs. He could hear Linda Farrell's voice, and he was bewildered and unhappy, hearing it. If he only knew what it all meant! What it meant, for instance, that Linda was down here, entirely dressed, obviously

not having been in her room at all, outside the house apparently, at a time, or dangerously near a time, anyway, when somebody had hurled Nurse Jessop over the chalk cliff. Was it possible that those two young people were not what he had thought they were? Could it be that they were the young generation he had seen in the films, stopping at nothing, perhaps, to get money and a life of ease without the bitter apprenticeship that his generation had taken for granted?

Could it be that the American films were right after all, and that this seemingly nice young man was just a gambler, a . . . a racketeer? And what, Mr. Pinkerton wondered unhappily, did that make Linda Farrell?

Even then, Mr. Pinkerton thought, it didn't explain Nurse Jessop.

He stood dismally on the landing, looking up at the bronze lady with the grapes. It didn't fit, any of it. He shook his head stubbornly. It was impossible to believe seriously that Andy Read was a gangster and Linda Farrell an international gangster's moll. It didn't make sense. On the other hand, that Linda Farrell was deeply associated, in Andy Read's mind, with the violent and thus far mysterious death of the two women, Mr. Pinkerton could not blind himself to. Only that view would explain Read's evidence about Marie Louise Isom's death. Only that would explain in the second place the odd and to Mr. Pinkerton at least embarrassing scene in the little reception-room below. A nice English girl would hardly allow a young foreigner to pull off her clothes, or many of them, and send her upstairs in a nightdress with a falsehood on her lips, unless there was the deepest provocation.

Mr. Andrew Read, furthermore, would not run the risk of doing such things unless he was desperately in love with her . . . and knew, or thought he knew, something terribly discreditable, or compromising, or at least suspicious about her.

Mr. Pinkerton sighed despondently. He went on up.

Bull, Linda and Miss Arnold were in the hall outside the library.

"May I go up now, Inspector?" Linda asked.

"I'm asking every one to go to bed now, and to stay in this house until the inquest to-morrow," Bull said.

She nodded sleepily. "Good night!"

"Good night, Inspector," Amelia Arnold said briskly. She followed Linda upstairs.

Bull watched them out of sight. He stood there a moment longer, chewing reflectively on his moustache, looking soberer than Mr. Pinkerton had seen him for a long time.

After a bit he moved, giving the impression of a Newfoundland dog shaking the snow off his coat, or at least of a man trying to get an unpleasant thought out of his mind. He looked tired too.

"It's too easy," he said wearily to Mr. Pinkerton, as they left the house. "Much too easy. I don't blame Johnson. This sort of thing doesn't do a seaside resort any good. It brings hordes of the wrong people, and the right ones stay away. Better than a typhoid epidemic, though. The ones who do die don't seem to be any great loss."

"Do you think," Mr. Pinkerton inquired tentatively, "that Nurse Jessop killed herself?"

"No, no," Bull said patiently. "No, she was killed. It's perfectly clear. Meant to look like suicide, of course."

"Well," Mr. Pinkerton said, "if she *did* kill Mrs. Isom——"

"She didn't," Bull said. "There was no evidence to prove it. Your theory wasn't bad. It was wrong, though. This proves that."

Mr. Pinkerton was silent. They walked along to the police car and got in.

"What happened to Miss Linda's young man?" Bull asked.

"Andy Read?" Mr. Pinkerton said guiltily.

Bull nodded. "Clever young fellow," he said. "I

wonder how he got Miss Farrell out of her bedroom and coming *up* the stairs?"

Mr. Pinkerton felt as if a cold heavy hand had closed on his heart. He said nothing at all, not being able to think at the moment of anything to say.

"I'm afraid he knows by now," Bull went on coolly, "that she doesn't get a penny of her guardian's money unless she marries Sellers."

The little man listened dumbly. He shivered with disappointment and chagrin. "Is . . . is that true?" he asked dismally.

"Yes. Sellers gets nothing either, unless he marries her. It complicates things rather. Or simplifies them."

"When did you find this out?"

"The solicitor fellow entertained them by reading the will, before he retired to his room."

"What . . . what else was in it?"

"Isom gets a life annuity of three hundred pounds. Miss Arnold fifty pounds outright, fifty a year. Also any of Mrs. Isom's clothes the Colonel doesn't want to keep."

"That's all of them, I expect," Mr. Pinkerton observed. He was speaking from personal experience.

Bull agreed soberly.

"It's an odd will," he went on. "She'd planned apparently to change several bequests. As a matter of fact, according to Evill, the estate has no great value. She'd converted her capital heavily during the last years. The five thousand the solicitor brought down here this morning with him represented a substantial part of it."

Mr. Pinkerton pondered wearily. "She must have spent a good deal of money," he volunteered.

"I expect she did."

"Don't . . . don't you think the nurse knew that, of course? If Mr. Evill is telling the truth, she did know about the five thousand pounds. It . . . it seems to me she'd be bound to know it was in that envelope."

He came to a full stop, thinking of what he had seen in the chest under the hall stairs, and went quickly on.

"It seems to me she'd been carrying on, one way or another, with both Sellers and the Colonel. Wouldn't she have been likely to have cashed in on the five thousand pounds, if she could do it, without being burdened with either of them?"

"I expect she would," Bull said, "if she could have done it. I don't see what her game was. We ought to know more about her. We will, when they get through at Sexton Old Bridge, of course. It . . . there's a theory it was she who kept the Colonel supplied with brandy."

Mr. Pinkerton was shocked. "Why should she do that?"

"I don't know. Too many things I don't know about this case. I expect it's as good a way to a drunkard's heart as another."

There was a harshness in his tone that seemed most unlike him.

They went into the hotel and up to their rooms. Mr. Pinkerton was sitting on one side of his bed taking off his boots when Bull came in and stood in the connecting doorway.

"What idea had you got about what your friend Read was doing on the sea wall, before he came up to you there?" he asked.

Mr. Pinkerton tried to think back. "It's odd," he said, "but all I remember now is hearing steps coming toward me, a long time before I really connected them with somebody actually coming. I . . . I was terribly upset, of course."

There was a knock at Bull's door. He came back in a minute.

"I expect we can turn in," he said. "Read's in bed. Johnson's put a man at his door, one inside the Isom house, one at the front door there, and one at the back in the mews too. Now that the horse is gone."

"What do you mean?" Mr. Pinkerton stammered guiltily.

"If there's a front door and a back door to a house," Bull said patiently, "there are two ways of leaving it . . . and coming back. Good night."

CHAPTER XXV

THE rain beat a cold gusty patter on the windows, a torn curtain flapped back and forth in the wind with a loud noise like the cracking of a whip. Mr. Pinkerton pulled the warm covers up about his scrawny neck and snuggled down closer in the deep pillows. The sharp tattoo on the door stopped, and began again. Mr. Pinkerton opened one eye. Then he remembered. It was summer, not winter. It was Wednesday, 12th August, in fact. He was in Brighton, not Siberia, and Brighton was compared always, as to climate, with the Riviera, not the North Pole. And furthermore somebody must be knocking at the door.

He crawled out of bed, shivering painfully, and pulled on his trousers. His dressing-gown he never really cared to be seen in; it was a New Oxford Street notion of what smart *hommes du monde* wore at the Lido. The door connecting his room with Bull's was closed, which was odd, he thought, struggling into his icy slippers. It had been open when Bull turned off his light. That was the last thing Mr. Pinkerton had remembered, at 1.28, at the end of the most crowded, most terrifying and most painful day he could remember ever to have lived.

The tattoo on the door beat again. He fumbled with the key. A dreary-looking maid with a pot of tea and some sodden biscuits on a tray blinked at him across the threshold.

"The other gentleman, sir, 'e says to bring you this, and tell you 'e'll be at the police station."

She sniffed and wiped her red nose on the back of her red chapped hand.

"I could bring your breakfast, sir, if you'd like. It's proper cold."

"Don't bother," Mr. Pinkerton said, teeth chattering. "I'll go down."

She sniffled again and padded off down the Green Trout's dark hall. Mr. Pinkerton closed the door with his foot and put the tray down on the table. He poured himself out a cup of strong hot tea and sipped gratefully at it. Everything fell gradually back into place as his blood, warmed a little, began to circulate: the murder of Mrs. Isom, the business of the yellow-haired Nurse Jessop, the . . .

Mr. Pinkerton put down his cup of tea and blinked at the closed door. That was what was worrying him. He had realized for some minutes that he was worried, but had not up to that point been able to think what about. He got up, crept cautiously over to the wardrobe and opened it. His coat was hanging there just as he had left it. He moistened his lips nervously and felt with stiff cold fingers into the right waistcoat-pocket. Then he breathed again. The silk cord with the bit of glass attached to it was still there, still quite safe.

He glanced at both doors and took it out. It was the first time he had had a chance to see it in the light. A small piece of glass was still there, where the cord was attached. Mr. Pinkerton stared suddenly. At the other end, where the slip knot was pulled hard and tight, there was a tiny bit of yellow cloth.

Mr. Pinkerton looked at it for a long time. What had happened was perfectly clear. Even he could see that. Nurse Jessop had not jumped off the cliff, nor had she fallen by accident. She had been pushed; and she had clutched frantically at the cord of Colonel Isom's eyeglass, clutching desperately at anything to save herself. She had clung to it, then, when she had gone over the edge . . . and she had still clutched it when it had torn from Colonel Isom's waistcoat buttonhole.

Mr. Pinkerton went back to his table and took a long gulp of hot tea. There was no question about it . . .

and yet? Was it conceivable that Colonel Isom . . . ? Mr. Pinkerton was greatly puzzled.

That Nurse Jessop had been murdered he had never doubted, of course. That was why he had taken the cord from her hand, so that they would think it was suicide. It had seemed more than reasonable, it had seemed imperative, the night before, with the steep, white cliff above him, the pounding sea at his back, as he had crouched there on the lonely sea wall by the dead woman's body. Now, in the very cold light of day, it seemed incredibly stupid . . . even, Mr. Pinkerton thought ruefully, for him. The vague fears, unexpressed even then, were gone completely now. All Mr. Pinkerton could do was wonder why he had done such a thing, and realize that he had culpably interfered in the course of justice.

He finished his tea and biscuits and sat there, looking out of the rain-dimmed window. Why, he wondered dismally, *had* he done it? He went over it in his mind, again and again. The more he thought of it, the more of a muddle it became. If, for instance, Colonel Isom had been in the library all the evening, then he had not been out on the cliff. If Mr. Pinkerton knew anything at all, Colonel Isom had given every appearance of being unconscious from brandy when he and Inspector Bull had gone.

An idea shot into Mr. Pinkerton's mind. He could have kicked himself for not seeing it before. Nurse Jessop had been thrown from the cliff, according to the testimony of her smashed watch, at 10.33—but he and Inspector Bull had not got to the Isom house until 10.51. It would easily have been possible for anyone to have got from the cliff to the house there in ten minutes, slipping in through the mews.

Still, no one in his right mind would have called attention to the fact that his eyeglass was missing, and kept on demanding Nurse Jessop, when he knew that in fact both were lying crushed at the bottom of the

cliff on the sea wall. Not, Mr. Pinkerton thought, unless he was a great deal cleverer, and a great deal soberer, than Colonel Horatio Vane Isom.

He blinked suddenly as he thought of that odd and rather alarming moment, last night, when he had thought Colonel Isom was watching them out of nearly closed eyes. But, of course, it simply couldn't have been.

And why, he thought then, bewildered and a little frightened for some reason, should he, Evan Pinkerton, widower, of sound mind so far as he knew, have deceived and betrayed the only friend he had in the world, in order to satisfy a perfectly vague notion of keeping the police from getting anywhere? It was utterly, fantastically, inexplicable.

He put the cord with its fragment of broken glass down on the table and got up. "I'll go and tell him what I did," he said to himself. "It's the only thing to do. He'll have to think what he likes."

The room seemed less cold and dreary when he had come to that decision. He shaved, dressed, put the black silk cord in his pocket, and went down to breakfast with a chastened, contrite and lighter heart, a man who had seen the error of his ways and was fully determined to act accordingly.

As someone has said, however, the best laid schemes of mice-like men gang aft agley. There was only one other person in the breakfast-room when he came in. He was buried behind *The Times* so completely that Mr. Pinkerton did not see it was Andrew Read until Andrew Read lowered his paper and saw that it was him.

His face brightened and he put the paper down.

"Hullo!" he said. "Join me, will you? Or do I know you well enough to speak to you? I keep forgetting I'm in England."

Mr. Pinkerton sat down in the proffered chair.

"Well," he said, "you see, I'm not English, really. I'm Welsh. So it's all right."

"Ah," Andy Read said. "That's a relief. Sometime maybe you'll explain how many times, and under what circumstances, you have to meet people in this country to have 'em speak to you in the street the next day. Not now, I mean—just some time. Just as a bit of national folk-lore."

Mr. Pinkerton nodded seriously and looked at the menu.

"I'm afraid I don't know myself," he said. "You see, Inspector Bull is really the only Englishman I know, almost, to speak to on the street. And the Bulls' cook-general; I speak to her. Inspector Bull's wife, too. She's partly Welsh. I . . . I think perhaps it's safer not to speak, ever. I'll have grilled bacon and eggs, please, and coffee."

The waitress placed a rack of icy toast in front of him, and a plate of grilled sausages, eggs and tomatoes in front of Mr. Read.

"I like breakfast better than anything else in England," Andy Read said. He grinned at Mr. Pinkerton in a very friendly way, however. "In fact, outside the climate, it's the only thing I do like. Except the beer, the grilled chops, the cheese, and gooseberry tart."

"And . . . English girls," Mr. Pinkerton added.

"Ah, yes. I don't seem to have much luck with them," Andy said. His grin was not so mirthful. "I guess my technique's lousy."

"I expect you're too impatient," Mr. Pinkerton said. He wondered at his boldness. "You . . . don't allow for . . . for differences in national temperament. Or something."

"Something anyway. That's a good way to put it."

The young man picked up his coffee cup and put it down with a groan.

"My God, if I could have just one good cup of coffee, I wouldn't give a damn whether I ever saw Linda Farrell again. As a matter of fact I don't, anyway. But

I would like a cup of coffee, instead of this . . . this hogwash."

Mr. Pinkerton had thought the coffee at the Green Trout was unusually good. He said nothing.

"English people say we make foul tea. I guess it's quits. Well, you going to the inquest?"

"Oh yes," Mr. Pinkerton said. "I am. To . . . both of them."

Andy Read ate perfunctorily a while.

"Do you still think Nurse Jessop killed herself?" Mr. Pinkerton asked. He glanced sideways at the young man.

Andy stared at him in surprise. "Sure. Don't you?"

"I suppose so."

They sat in silence again. Mr. Pinkerton said, "I wonder if you would ask Miss Farrell——"

"*Me?*" Andy interrupted. "Ask some other guy. I'm not seeing Miss Farrell, these days."

"You . . . you . . ." Mr. Pinkerton stammered in great distress.

"Sure," Read said. "I've been given the air. She's marrying Mr. Quentin Sellers, the old family retainer. This morning, I believe, or something like it. Hadn't you heard?"

He grinned across the table. There was still less amusement in the grin.

Mr. Pinkerton felt very dismal indeed. "Not . . . *really!*"

"That's what they both say. They ought to know, Mr. Pinkerton. I gathered it's got some mystical connection with the unlamented nurse's leap to death."

"But that . . . that's ridiculous!" Mr. Pinkerton cried. "That child doesn't want to marry him!"

Andy Read shrugged his lean broad shoulders and put a large piece of toast covered with marmalade in his mouth.

"That shows what a child you are, Mr. Pinkerton," he said, when he could speak. "I think it's a very nice

trait. *I'm* simple, too. As a matter of fact, Mr. Pinkerton, I'm simpler than I thought I was. I thought she was crazy about *me*. That's where I was wrong. And oh, how wrong I was! I was what we call the fall guy."

He looked expectantly at the little grey man.

"The . . . ?" Mr. Pinkerton said.

"The fall guy. I was the man whose purpose—unknown to him, mind you—was to bring Mr. Sellers to heel. Bring the roving eye back from the dizzy blonde nurse. Live and learn, Mr. Pinkerton; or, the biter bit."

Mr. Read managed another sorry grin.

Mr. Pinkerton was dismayed, puzzled and incredulous. "Then, why are you being so . . . I mean, what . . . I mean, aren't you being either very wrong, or very quixotic?" he managed to get out.

"Some people would call it a spade and have done with it," Andy said. "Well, I say it's my good deed for the day. Once an Eagle Scout, always an Eagle Scout."

"I . . . I know," Mr. Pinkerton said, having no faintest notion of what any of this meant. "But are you . . . are you being wise?"

"Wise?" said Mr. Read. "I'm not even being smart. Or maybe I am—you can't tell. Anyway, if he's married to her, he can't testify against her. Can he? If I'm married to her, well, he can. Now maybe I'm not being wise—but she is. Plenty."

"Well," Mr. Pinkerton said hesitatingly, "what do you think he can . . ."

It occurred to him that perhaps he had no right to ask that question.

"Oh dear!" he said. "I'm sure you're not being fair to her."

"Yes?" Andy Read said. "Well, you aren't supposed to be fair to the gal that's blighted your life, are you? I mean, there's no law, not even in England. . . ."

"No," Mr. Pinkerton said simply. "I suppose not. But——"

"Never mind. Just think of all the proverbs you know about fish left in the sea. You can go on for hours, and come out knowing it doesn't make any difference. You were just another sap. Adam was the first and the last hasn't been born. So, what the hell . . ."

Mr. Pinkerton shook his head. It was distressing to him to sit there, at what might have been a pleasant breakfast, listening to such talk, dismal and foreboding, from a young man whom he liked very much—of course without knowing him intimately—and who might easily, if he kept on this way, succeed in putting his neck in a noose, just to help a girl who apparently wasn't worth it.

Thinking that, he said something that he had had no idea of saying at all, and that he wished at once he had not said.

"Is that why you . . . you put her clothes in the hall chest last night?"

Andy Read's coffee cup stopped half way to his mouth. His tanned face went a shade paler, then three shades redder.

"I . . . what was that?" he said.

Mr. Pinkerton boggled. "I'm . . . I'm so sorry," he managed to get out. "I . . . hadn't meant to let you know I saw you. But I did, you know."

Read put his cup down slowly and carefully.

"You did?" he asked. "You and who else?"

"Just me," Mr. Pinkerton stammered. "Not anybody else at all."

Read poured himself another cup of coffee in what Mr. Pinkerton thought was an alarming silence.

"I . . . I shan't tell anybody, of course," he said quickly.

Read looked at him for an instant.

"That's funny, you know," he said. "I thought I'd heard somebody out there. But . . . I thought it was somebody else."

He stirred his coffee deliberately.

"I might tell you about it. I'd like to, in a way. Get it off my chest. But I guess that's out. If you don't know, you can't accidentally let it out. Your big cinnamon friend can't worm it out of you without your knowing it, either."

He brought out his pipe and filled it.

"That man looks simple, but I guess he's nobody's fool. I'd hate to have him on my track. It would be my guess he'd hang his grandmother without batting an eye. Very detached kind of a chap, I mean."

Mr. Pinkerton did not quite know whether he should agree or not. It seemed disloyal to Inspector Bull to do so, in a way. In a way, however, it was perfectly true. Mr. Pinkerton shivered a little. He was painfully aware of the black silk cord in his waistcoat-pocket.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE inquest into the death of Marie Louise Isom was brief and to the point. Even suspiciously so, Mr. Pinkerton thought. In fact, virtually everything that he could think of that pointed remotely at any specific person seemed to have been carefully left out.

The attendant at the Pavilion said that he had admitted deceased and her nursing attendant at sixpence each, and that they had gone into the Red Drawing-room, following the signs that said "This Way." Deceased had been in the bath-chair. He had admitted them at about the same time on the preceding day. Whether they had been there before that he could not say, being only temporarily on duty while the regular attendant was on holiday.

He had not again seen either of the two women until after the tragedy. Colonel Isom had come in a few moments after the deceased, followed, after some minutes again, by Mr. Quentin Sellers. He had known both of them by sight for some time. Mr. Sellers had not gone through the Red Drawing-room, but immediately into the Gallery. Colonel Isom had gone the customary way.

Mr. Marius Evill, whom the attendant did not know, had come there before deceased and her nurse, as had a lady accompanied by a young girl. The latter two had been preceded by an impatient young man, obviously American. A couple of persons, trippers, had come in then; and they in turn had been followed by a small man in a grey lounge suit and brown bowler hat. Miss Amelia Arnold had gone out very soon after that. He had not noticed her returning.

The attendant was able to point out all these people

in the room, except one, and did so without hesitation. The missing one was Polly, Steve Burkett's girl. "Which," thought Mr. Pinkerton, "leaves us exactly where we've always been."

Amelia Arnold said that she had come to the Pavilion with Linda Farrell, left, returned, and had then first seen deceased alone in the Music Room, and had gone to fetch her nurse, who had left her. She had not been able to find her immediately and had returned, to find to her horror that deceased was dead, with a small knife sticking in her throat. She identified the knife. She had drawn it out, thinking there might still be life in deceased. She had lived with deceased for fifteen years, and until a stroke eighteen months before had taken care of deceased in any illnesses she had had.

Asked if she had known that deceased was remembering her in her will, Miss Arnold said that she had known it. Deceased had frequently told her she would leave her fifty pounds as a gift and fifty pounds a year. Deceased had been hard at times. She had at least given her a home when she had had none, and had been kind to her after her fashion.

Mr. Andrew Read said that he had seen Mrs. Isom in the Music Room. It was his opinion that she was dead then. She was sitting in her bath-chair, her head forward. He had not gone in to look at her. It had been his impression then, when he saw her there, that she was sleep, which would explain, of course, why she had been left alone. He saw her only from the Gallery door. As she was facing the windows and North Drawing-room door, he would not have seen the knife. He did not see the black leather envelope, but would not have seen it if it had been in her lap. When he did see her later, after her murder had been discovered, he recognized that she was still in the posture that he had seen her in, and had no doubt she had then been dead.

Linda Farrell said that she had come to the Pavilion with Miss Arnold. She had started to go to the Music

Room to speak to Mrs. Isom. Something she had seen on the way had interrupted her. She had slipped through the North Drawing-room and out across the lawn to keep from being seen by certain people. She had not seen her guardian at all.

The coroner, Mr. Betterly, looked oddly at her, glanced down at the Chief Constable, and looked at his papers again.

"Why did you make a statement to the police authorities, Miss Farrell, that you had seen and talked with your guardian?"

Linda Farrell shook her head, flushed, and said nothing.

The coroner waited. He said then, "Why were you in the Pavilion, Miss Farrell?"

The girl was silent still. Mr. Pinkerton squirmed. Mr. Betterly glanced at Farquarson, who shook his head. Linda Farrell was dismissed without further questioning. After some minutes of perfunctory summing up, the coroner's jury brought in a verdict equally perfunctory. Murder by person or persons unknown.

Mr. Pinkerton, looking warily over his shoulder to the back of the room, where Inspector Bull was sitting with Farquarson, happened to let his eye rest in passing on the egg-shaped head and glistening brow of Steve Burkett, who was sitting there beside a large red-haired young man whom Mr. Pinkerton recognized as one of the Brighton force.

He turned back quickly. It was not so much Steve's leer that worried him as the patient stolid gaze of Inspector Bull at the back. It then occurred to Mr. Pinkerton that all this was a sham. They had not even called Burkett to give evidence. The unhappy thought came to him that his burly friend from Scotland Yard was not being as open and above-board as he would have liked, and not for the first time in the last twenty-four hours.

The vague half-formed fear in the little man's heart stirred as a small white worm stirs in the heart of a

brown frost-bitten rosebud. It was still there, that vague squirming fear, when the coroner announced that the inquest into the death of Marie Louise Isom was ended and the inquest into the death of Marguerite Jessop was in progress.

And it, to Mr. Pinkerton's continued distrust, was equally perfunctory. Colonel Isom identified the body. Arthur L. Noakes said that Nurse Jessop had instructed him, the previous evening, not to disturb her, that she was retiring to her room to sleep. He had not known that she was out of the house. /

Dr. Thurston, the police surgeon, explained that he had examined the body of deceased. There was no doubt that she had met her death from injuries resulting from a fall. There followed a technical account of the injuries. Death had been instantaneous, and had occurred roughly between 9.30 and 11 o'clock. It was pointed out between coroner and witness that as her wrist-watch had stopped at 10.33 o'clock, there was no difficulty in accepting that as the actual moment of her death.

"Thank you," the coroner said. "Mr. Evan Pinkerton."

Mr. Pinkerton took his place in the box. It was a place that he had had a good deal of experience with, what with one case and another that he had blundered into, and he stood there with an ease, or rather, as he hoped, an appearance of ease, that surprised even himself. His evidence was simple. He was walking on the cliff before returning to his hotel. He had met the two people coming terrified up the steps, had gone down, and had found Marguerite Jessop's body.

He braced himself then for the barrage of questions that were sure to come. What had he really been doing on the cliff at that time of night? Who were the couple? What had Andrew Read been doing, down there on the sea wall. And all the rest. But no questions came. Mr. Betterly nodded as he finished.

"Thank you, Mr. Pinkerton. It must have been a great shock."

"Oh yes!" Mr. Pinkerton said hastily. "Very much so."

"Thank you, Mr. Pinkerton."

Bull did not even look up from his note-book as Mr. Pinkerton came back to his seat, or even when Andrew Read was called again. Mr. Pinkerton, however, listened anxiously. Again he was disappointed, or rather bewildered. The coroner determined, by three simple questions, that Mr. Read had been walking on the sea wall, had come upon Mr. Pinkerton kneeling by the side of deceased, and had gone at once to call the police; remarked that it must have been a shock for him as well, thanked him and dismissed him.

He then adjourned the inquest to a future date, due notice of which would be given through the customary and proper channels.

Mr. Pinkerton stood behind Andy Read, waiting until the bereaved household of Marie Louise Isom filed out. Linda Farrell walked with Miss Arnold, who was heavily swathed in a black veil. Mr. Pinkerton saw that Linda did not wear a veil, and also that she did not look at Andy as they passed. Only the colour surging suddenly into her cheeks, and the fraction of an inch that she tossed her head, indicated that she was aware of him. That, and the cold stare of Mr. Quentin Sellers as he pressed protectingly closer to her elbow.

Mr. Pinkerton glanced anxiously up at Andy Read, and decided, almost angrily, that he was a mouldy idiot to be distressed at the affairs of a young man who himself seemed to be in no way distressed by them.

Andy Read was lighting a cigarette. He grinned as he caught Mr. Pinkerton's look, and patted the little man on the back.

"Buck up, old fellow," he said cheerfully. "So long—I'll be seeing you."

With that he left, moving through the excited throng

as if it really had no actual corporeal existence. Mr. Pinkerton saw him go through the door just behind Colonel Isom and Noakes, who had taken the Colonel's arm and was guiding him through the crowd outside.

A voice in front of him in the crowded room brought him sharply back to himself. "Doesn't take much to see through that," a woman was saying. "I always say they ought not to let women go into houses where men are until they've reached the age of discretion."

She and her neighbour tittered.

"Of course, you'd think she might have reached it."

"That's right. And that Noakes is smooth."

"How did she come to do so much talking to him, is what I wonder."

"I always said she was too smart to be *just* a nurse."

Mr. Pinkerton looked round for Bull.

"I've seen them myself, out at night in the square. Out for a breath of air, indeed."

That was a third voice, a woman who had turned about just in front of them. They were all heading slowly for the court-room door.

The two in front of Mr. Pinkerton nodded simultaneously.

"He's a handsome man. The old lady was fond enough of him, from all they say."

The three heads nodded simultaneously.

"Their cook told my Bessy she'd almost got the sack for telling Mrs. Isom she'd seen the two of them together in Rottingdean one afternoon, having tea."

That was a voice behind Mr. Pinkerton, speaking over his shoulder. He edged off to one side as much as he could.

"Ah. What would a person like that be doing, having tea with a person like him?"

"Ah. Maybe he's as good as her, from all they implied."

Mr. Pinkerton listened, wondering. They seemed, all four of them, quite clear they were talking about the

same persons. He wondered if it was possible that they were. Off to one side, he looked curiously at them. They were obviously upper servants, or former upper servants, themselves. No doubt now ran cheap boarding-houses for city clerks. It was a type that Mr. Pinkerton knew very well. They were apt to be shrewd people.

One of them caught him staring at them and touched her neighbour's arm. Three faces turned round at him. They giggled and whispered, nudging each other in fat corseted sides.

Mr. Pinkerton looked still more anxiously about for Bull, and edged quite over out of the aisle. He wondered where the Inspector could have got to, and had the feeling of being rather deserted. It was only for a moment. The four women had gone on, others had come up behind them and were moving slowly out. A sallow-faced girl with red hands and frightened eyes edged up to him and thrust a folded piece of paper awkwardly into his hand.

"From Miss Arnold, sir," she whispered. "She says it's important."

She looked nervously over her shoulder.

"She says don't let anybody see it."

Mr. Pinkerton slipped the note into his pocket as the girl edged back into the crowd. A little glow came to his heart. For one thing, he felt entirely in command, again, of his own small situation. It was the effect that seeing anyone less competent and more ill at ease than himself always had on him. Unfortunately, in the nature of things, it seldom happened; but when it did, it was bracing indeed.

The red-handed girl disappeared into the crowd. Mr. Pinkerton glanced casually about and opened the note.

"I'm worried about Linda," it ran, without any salutation. "She's got some horrible notion it won't be fair for her not to marry Q. S. on account of Mrs. I.'s

will. Can't you help me? Come out if you can. I don't want to leave Linda."

It was signed "A. A."

Mr. Pinkerton put it back into his pocket and hurried out into the street. Little knots of people were still standing about, waiting for something else to happen, talking. Bull was nowhere in sight. For a moment Mr. Pinkerton had the odd notion that he ought to find him and tell him what he was doing. But there obviously was not time. Andy Read was not in sight, either. Mr. Pinkerton looked searchingly about. People in the little groups were looking at him, new faces turned toward him. A woman disengaged herself and started over to where he was standing, perplexed and undecided. That was enough; Mr. Pinkerton was off in an instant.

He nipped into King's Road and, to his great surprise, leaped on to a moving bus with the agility of a rather elderly but still active monkey.

CHAPTER XXVII

As he sat down a large clean-faced woman across the aisle looked at him a moment, hesitated, and leaned toward him.

"I beg pardon, sir," she said.

Mr. Pinkerton breathed more freely. The pleasant sing-song cadence in her voice was familiar and reassuring.

"But I'm Mrs. Howie—I'm the cook at Colonel Isom's."

Mr. Pinkerton's face brightened. "Won't you . . . sit over here?" he said. He moved the last remaining inch toward the window. Mrs. Howie smiled gratefully and moved across the aisle.

"It's all very sad, all this," Mr. Pinkerton said, realizing his hypocrisy to the full.

"Oh, it is, sir. I thought that you being Welsh too, sir . . . Oh, it's very hard. I'm not one to speak ill of the dead, but the mistress was a hard woman, sir. You can't blame the gentleman for liking a bit of fun. And she was merry as a grig when the mistress wasn't about."

Mrs. Howie looked troubled. Mr. Pinkerton nodded sympathetically and did his best to look troubled too. In a sense he was troubled. He was always troubled when playing the rôle of whited sepulchre, for fear the whiting would crack.

"It's this way, sir. She was a cut above him, or maybe you could say he's a cut above himself."

She looked expectantly at him. Mr. Pinkerton realized that he was supposed to understand, to appreciate, and to sympathize. Not understanding, it was hard to do the rest. He nodded as meaningfully as he could. The one thing he must not do, he knew

very well, was interrupt. "Always let them tell their own story in their own way" was one of the first precepts in a course of Detection Simplified, given by a former superintendent of the C.I.D., that he had started to take once.

"But it did look odd, her being a nursing sister and him a chauffeur-butler and all."

Then Mr. Pinkerton understood the factors, or at least the actors, in the exposition that Mrs. Howie was giving him; and what she had said flashed into his mind in its full meaning.

"You mean . . . ?" he gasped.

Mrs. Howie nodded. "My daughters saw them at the Holborn Empire together once, in town," she said. "Many's the time I've heard him telling her what for, when they didn't know anybody was about."

The grey little man's heart beat a swift intoxicating tattoo. So that was it, then. It was Noakes. Noakes the saturnine bulging-eyed chauffeur, and ditto butler, who was supposed to have waited while Nurse Jessop took Mrs. Isom to the Pavilion. Noakes who hadn't called her when Colonel Isom wanted her, last night. . . . Mr. Pinkerton's mind raced. Of course. Why should he have called her? He knew she was dead. There was no check on him there, in the house. He could easily have slipped out. Mr. Pinkerton groped; something had been said, somewhere, by somebody, indicating clearly that he had *not* been in the house.

"It looked very strange, many times, and of course it was her that recommended him to the mistress after she'd practically driven Turner out," Mrs. Howie went on. "He was never much good, Turner, and he did steal, and he drank more than was good for him, I'll admit. But she didn't care so much about anything of that sort. She told him he could give notice himself, or she'd tell Mrs. Isom and have him sacked with a bad name. He thought she was having a bit of a joke at first, but she wasn't, no fear. He did give notice,

and got a proper letter, all about how honest and sober and all he was. Then Noakes came the next week. Nobody caught on till Elsa saw them at Rottingdean one afternoon, and she almost got the sack for not keeping her mouth shut."

"Did she ever say how she'd come to know him?" Mr. Pinkerton asked eagerly.

"Oh yes, sir. She'd been at a house in the country where he was, and the master had died . . ."

Mr. Pinkerton's heart beat madly. He did not wait for the bus to get to Arundel Terrace, or even to stop. He darted back to the rear platform without bothering to say good-bye to Mrs. Howie and jumped off at Eaton Square. That was a mistake, he quickly realized, for when, rushing along, looking for a telephone booth, he had at last got to one in the shelter opposite Arundel Terrace, the bus was at least passing Roedean and Mrs. Howie had some minutes before gone through Arundel Mews into her kitchen, wondering still why her countryman had acted in such a fashion.

He called the Chief Constable's office breathlessly. Bull was not there. He was not at the Green Trout. He was nowhere at all that Mr. Pinkerton could find. He left the shelter dejected and deflated, crossed the wide road, turned into Arundel Terrace and went along Lewes Crescent. He should, of course, he was thinking, have told someone in the Chief Constable's office. Steve Burkett's story was true. The butler Noakes was the man who had been with Nurse Jessop at Sexton Old Bridge; Steve had done time for their crime.

"They'll find the man there was murdered too," Mr. Pinkerton thought excitedly.

He turned the corner into Sussex Square. His heart leaped with joy. Ahead of him was the Isom house, and in front of it was the police car, and Inspector Bull just getting out of it.

Mr. Pinkerton broke into a run. "I say, Inspector!" he called. Bull turned. Mr. Pinkerton ran up, breathless.

"It's Noakes!" he cried. "The butler—he was at Sexton Old Bridge with the nurse!"

Bull looked down at him.

"He won't get away, Pinkerton," he said patiently. "I arrested him when he left the inquest."

Mr. Pinkerton blinked through his steel-rimmed lozenge-shaped spectacles.

Bull's blue eyes lighted with a tiny flicker of amused sympathy.

"Clever of you to have got on to it, Pinkerton," he said kindly. "How did you find out?"

"Then you've known all the time?" Mr. Pinkerton demanded.

"Not *known*. It was a possibility. Then Burkett identified him."

"Oh," Mr. Pinkerton said. "I see. Why, I . . . I met the Isom cook. She——"

"A Welsh woman, I expect," Bull said. There was a second little twinkle in his eye.

"Yes," Mr. Pinkerton said. "I——"

"I know," Bull said. If Mr. Pinkerton had ever run on to any kind of special information, in all their long association, it had always been safe to assume that he had met one of his countrymen. It had never failed so far.

"Well, it's always best to have *evidence*," he went on placidly. "You can't just figure things out and barge in."

"No," Mr. Pinkerton said. "I expect you can't."

He had, of course, been asking for it. He knew that.

"I . . . I was coming to see Miss Arnold," he said timidly. "If you'd rather I didn't . . ."

A smile bloomed like the morning on Bull's heavy face. Mr. Pinkerton flushed, for no reason. Bull nodded. "Be careful," he said, and very nearly chuckled. If he had done, it would have been one of the three or four times in his life so far as Mr. Pinkerton knew. He set off then down the street.

Mr. Pinkerton watched him till he had turned into the crescent. Then he rang the door-bell and waited.

The door was opened by a rosy-cheeked housemaid whom he had not yet seen. Her mob cap was awry and her eyes were popping with curiosity.

"Is Miss Arnold in?"

"I'll tell her, sir. Are you another one of the detective gentlemen?" she added in a whisper.

"Not . . . exactly," Mr. Pinkerton said.

"Did you know they'd taken Mr. Noakes, sir? He's the butler. Mrs. Howie near dropped dead when she heard of it. She's cook, and she'd been to the inquest, and she didn't know as much as me that stopped home."

Mr. Pinkerton stared. "How did you know?"

"Oh, the detectives have been here all morning. The big brown one was here early, before anybody was up excepting Mr. Noakes, looking all through Jessop's room. And after Mr. Noakes and everybody, Colonel Isom that is and Miss Arnold and Miss Linda, left to go to the inquest, in came a whole lot of them, and they've been over the place again, like they was looking for brambleberries. It *was* fun to watch! They found two salt spoons cook lost in June, and the Colonel's eyeglass he lost last Boxing Day—it was down behind the cushion in the sofa in the library—and all sorts of things! I was the only one in the house. It *was* exciting, sir!"

Her eyes sparkled like a child's. Suddenly she remembered herself. "I'm sorry, sir. I'll call Miss Arnold."

She opened the door into the little reception-room where he and Andy Read had sat, and where Andy had practically disrobed the protesting Linda. "If you'll just wait here, sir."

Mr. Pinkerton sat down. He was more than a bit dazed by everything. Bull had come out before the inquest and gone through Nurse Jessop's room. He had then had the whole place searched for the second

time. Mr. Pinkerton's heart sank. They would have found Linda's clothes bundled together in the chest. It would not have taken Bull two seconds to see what that meant. They would also have found the empty leather envelope.

Mr. Pinkerton got up hastily and slipped out into the hall. He looked quickly to either side and up the stairs, opened the chest and closed it again just as Amelia Arnold appeared on the stairs. He moved away.

She looked puzzled as she shook hands with him.

"I . . . I was just looking at the chest," he said lamely. He was aware of how cool her hand was, and how smooth, in his own dry hot one.

"It's a nice one, isn't it? Colonel Isom got it in the Honduras. It's usually kept locked."

She was obviously surprised.

"Really?" Mr. Pinkerton said.

"Everything about the house was kept locked. Mrs. Isom had an odd notion people were going to rob her."

Mr. Pinkerton followed into the reception-room.

"I suppose it wasn't so odd, as they really did do."

She pulled a spear of scarlet gladiolus forward in the tall silver vase on the centre table, and another one back. Her hands, moving skilfully among the scarlet blossoms, were rather nice, Mr. Pinkerton thought. He noticed now that her grey hair curled about her forehead. Her eyes were not grey like Linda's but a greenish-blue, and very nice also. Her figure was not so unattractive as he would have thought, now she had got off her nondescript raincoat and he could see it.

Miss Arnold sat down beside him. "You know," she said, "you're a great comfort to me."

Mr. Pinkerton blinked. "I——"

"This morning your friend Inspector Bull arrived with the milk. He went through Jessop's room. You've never seen anything like it. I had no notion what it meant to search a place. You should have seen him. And you should have seen what he uncovered."

"What?" Mr. Pinkerton asked curiously.

"Nearly a whole case of brandy in the first place. Which is peculiarly interesting because Mrs. Isom had got it into her head that Noakes or Linda was supplying the Colonel with it."

Mr. Pinkerton was shocked. "Not Miss Farrell, surely," he said.

She nodded. "That's curious too. Until Jessop came here, nothing that Linda could do annoyed Mrs. Isom. She didn't let her go out with people of her own age, and she dressed her like something in an 1890 Ladies' Book. Except for that Linda was white with a blue rim round her. Then, a month after Jessop came, Linda couldn't do anything that didn't drive Mrs. Isom frantic."

She shook her head.

"In fact, nothing any of us did pleased her any more. But she'd begun to find her out. And oddly enough, it happened one night when she rang for Jessop and Jessop wasn't here. She rang for Lucy and got everybody out, and Quentin Sellers wasn't here. It was after that that she got her detective. I'd thought at first it was *they* who'd got him, to spy on Linda."

Mr. Pinkerton listened with shameless avidity.

"Do you think there was . . . anything between them?"

"I wouldn't say, because I don't really know. It's easy, now she's dead, to say unkind things I never dared say when she and Marie Isom were both alive."

Amelia Arnold smiled ruefully. "The lot of a companion is a drab stupid one at best. But . . . well, it was all I had. It was better than being a shop assistant at fifteen shillings a week. That's what I was offered when I tried to get a post. I'll take it now, I expect—if I can get it—and be glad to have it."

She got up abruptly and stood for an instant looking out of the heavily curtained windows into the square. Then she smiled and shrugged her shoulders.

"They're all upstairs complaining about the provision she made for them in her will. I suppose I'm the only person in the house that's . . . Oh, well. That doesn't matter—does it?"

"Oh yes," Mr. Pinkerton said earnestly. "I . . . I think it matters very much."

"Not really." She smiled again. "And you'd never have come if I'd said I wanted to talk about my troubles not Linda's."

"Indeed I should have," Mr. Pinkerton said quickly.

She looked at him for an instant. "I believe you would," she said quietly. "I told you you were very comforting. However, I don't really. I mean I do want to talk about Linda. I'm terribly upset about her."

She went over to the door, looked out, and came back.

"Mrs. Isom's will," she said in a low voice, "leaves an annuity to Linda, and one to Sellers, if they marry each other. Nothing if they don't. And Linda is a fool. I mean, Quentin Sellers is a very attractive man, when he wants to be . . . I mean to most women. And a very attractive man suddenly desperately dependent on a young girl has a very powerful appeal."

"But . . . that's silly!" Mr. Pinkerton exclaimed.

"That's just where you're wrong, my friend," Amelia Arnold said quietly.

It was a new experience to Mr. Pinkerton to have an obviously intelligent woman call him "my friend" quietly and as if she meant it. He liked it. He nodded inquiringly.

"All the years when Linda was growing up, Quentin Sellers was keeping his hand in, so to speak. He couldn't tell, of course, which way the wind might blow. So, he was always playfully gallant to her. When she was growing up she was head over ears in love with him. Heavens, can you blame her? He was the only man she ever saw, except Colonel Isom and Noakes or other butlers, and he was always paying her little attentions. Partly on the sly, just to amuse himself and Mrs. Isom."

"I . . . I think that's despicable," Mr. Pinkerton said indignantly.

"It was all she had," Miss Arnold said. Her smile was sardonic. "It was experience . . . of a sort. Even after she knew it wasn't deeper, it was at least always available—till Marguerite Jessop came."

"Well, she didn't really mind that, did she?"

Mr. Pinkerton flushed, fearing his question was probably very naïve.

Amelia Arnold smiled again. "I'm afraid she did, Mr. Pinkerton. After all, she's very young, and she's very human. I shouldn't be surprised if she didn't feel in a sense that Jessop was a challenge to her . . . as a woman. You're probably thinking I'm a silly romantic old maid. But I expect that's the way it went on, inside Linda. Unconsciously, of course. Oh, but you can see it! If the only man in your life sat down at dinner and said, 'You're charming this evening, Linda!' or, if she had a new frock, 'This little beauty here isn't our Linda!' . . . It was play, of course. But when it stopped because there was a bleached blonde at the table . . . well, of course she minded—terribly."

Mr. Pinkerton could understand that. "But Andy Read?" he asked. "I thought——"

"Of course," Amelia Arnold said. "So did I. I still think we were right. Except . . . he's acted in a very strange way. Linda feels now, and I don't know if she hasn't better intuition in these matters at her age than I have at mine—she feels he was just amusing himself too. I don't know what happened last night. It was something . . . disillusioning. I understand he told her she wasn't any treat to him, he'd got a lot of sisters and had been to Paris. I don't know what he meant or how the point came up. I don't know whether he was trying to seduce her or she him. It sounds like the latter."

Mr. Pinkerton looked at the toe of his boot. He really did not mind women speaking frankly, but it could be

a bit abrupt. He thought for a moment of explaining what it was all about. He would have liked to confide in Amelia Arnold, but a certain native delicacy definitely restricted his range of elucidation. Furthermore and chiefly, he had no idea at all of why Linda Farrell had thought it was so disillusioning. Above that, Mr. Pinkerton thought suddenly, he did not know why any of it had been necessary; what Linda Farrell had been doing there.

"That, apparently, with a certain noticeable coolness, was what decided her. I don't understand——"

"Decided her?" Mr. Pinkerton asked.

"To marry Sellers. Mr. Read also said she could marry a Chinaman for all he cared. So . . . she's going to marry Sellers, just to show him. If it were only that, there might be some hope. But the idea that Sellers needs her, that if she doesn't marry him he'll have to go to work, that he—as she thinks—was about to send Jessop away because she asked him to do it, that her love meant more to him than an attractive blonde . . . well, there you have it."

Mr. Pinkerton sat there, much perplexed. "It . . . it's very difficult," he said at last.

"Very," Miss Arnold said dryly. "Quentin Sellers is also very shrewd."

They sat in silence for a moment.

Then she said, "Why don't you talk to her?"

"Oh dear!" Mr. Pinkerton exclaimed. "Whatever should I say to her?"

Miss Arnold thought a moment. "Does he really care for her, do you think?"

"Oh yes, indeed!" Mr. Pinkerton said. "That is, I should certainly think so. I should think he cares for her very much. But then I'm awfully gullible . . . and inexperienced——"

"Nonsense!" Amelia Arnold said. "Didn't Linda see you trotting off with Marguerite Jessop? That was a blow to her too. She's thought of you as her friend."

Mr. Pinkerton winced. He really should explain, he thought, that it was Nurse Jessop trotting off with him. However, having the rôle of a Casanova, even a faint-hearted Casanova, thrust on him was flattering.

"I . . . perhaps I might speak to her," he said. He added to himself, "but I must be very careful not to commit Andy to anything he wouldn't care to go through with."

It was very difficult. He wished earnestly that these people would act like normal human beings. Or was this the way normal human beings of their age acted? It was most puzzling.

"Thank you!" Amelia Arnold said warmly. "I hoped you would. She's up in the library."

CHAPTER XXVIII

UPSTAIRS in the Isom house, past the nude ladies, with the lighted clusters of fruit, Mr. Pinkerton approached the library with misgivings. He was sure in his own heart that Andy Read was still in love, desperately in love, with Linda. But what that meant, considering how little he really knew about Andy Read, he was not sure. After all, he had said that about Paris. But surely . . . !

He peered into the library through the open door. It was empty. He went inside and sat down to wait. It was quite too late to do anything about it when he realized that Linda and Quentin Sellers were outside the window on the balcony. Too late, that is, to do anything except what he naturally wanted to do. The library fortunately was not brightly lighted. He moved back towards the fireplace, out of sight.

"Perhaps it's what I deserve, Linda—living near you all these years and only realizing how terribly, terribly I love you, just when I'm losing you! "

Mr. Pinkerton listened, uncomprehending, wondering. Was this good, or bad?

"I wish the business of Marie's will had not come out. I shouldn't want you to marry me because you were sorry for me, and that sort of thing. . . ."

"Hypocrite," Mr. Pinkerton thought.

"I know he's nearer your age, Linda dear. It's not his fault he's an American. Frankly, I don't like Americans. Still, we can't help being born in definite places. Maybe he's a lot worthier of you than I am. . . ."

Mr. Pinkerton scowled. Linda's voice, low and tired, came through the window.

"Oh, please don't! I don't want to marry him. It's not that. I only thought it would be better if . . . if we waited."

Quentin Sellers's voice was pleading. "For what, Linda?"

"I don't know. Just because . . . it seems so sudden, that's all. No—I'm not afraid. It's just that——"

"Just that what, Linda?"

"Oh, it's nothing. I'm just sort of silly, I suppose. Amelia says——"

Mr. Sellers's voice was harsh for an instant. "That old woman. All right. If you'd rather—Linda, you wouldn't. . . ."

"Oh no, it's not that, Quentin. It's . . . oh, it doesn't matter."

Her voice went suddenly dead. It occurred to Mr. Pinkerton indignantly that she must have been under this emotional barrage for hours.

"Oh, I'll go. The night boat."

"Linda!"

His voice was a triumphant gloating shout. "Oh, damn!" Mr. Pinkerton said. It was almost the only time in his life he had ever sworn.

"I'll go now and make the plans. You'll never regret it, Linda!"

Never regret it indeed, Mr. Pinkerton thought angrily. Andy Read's voice saying "I'm just another sap" rang in his ears. He had got only a rough idea of what a sap was, but there was no doubt it was something unusually mouldy.

He crouched down behind the sofa just as he had done before. Peering boldly round the end he could see Quentin Sellers come debonairly in from the balcony, whistling gaily, rubbing his hands together . . . being, in general, about as offensive to Mr. Pinkerton's mind as anyone he had seen for a long time. He went on through the library. Mr. Pinkerton waited, but Linda did not come in.

He waited for some minutes, then got up and tip-toed cautiously to the window, and peered out. She was standing there, leaning on the iron railing, staring out, with wide-set eyes, over the garden roofs into nothing. He could see a large tear roll down the sun-warmed cheek and drop on the back of her hand. Suddenly she dropped on her knees, her head against her bare arms, and burst into passionate, unbearable weeping. Mr. Pinkerton, listening in appalled and painfully sympathetic silence, could hear her choked voice: "Oh, I can't! I can't!"

He drew back into the room. It wasn't right. In fact it was horrible. He cleared his throat, and again more loudly. The sound on the balcony stopped abruptly. He waited. In a moment Linda stood in the long sunlit window. Her eyes were reddened and her lips trembled a little; apart from that there was nothing to show that she was a girl who had been abandoned thirty seconds before to a storm of tears.

"Oh," she said, and not very cordially, Mr. Pinkerton noticed.

"I . . . I've come to tell you you must not marry Mr. Quentin Sellers," he heard himself saying, and flushed crimson at both the idea and still worse the fact of his having said such a thing.

Linda Farrell stood there an instant, as tall as Mr. Pinkerton, straight, stern and young. Two warm spots bloomed suddenly in her pale cheeks.

"Yes?" she said. Her voice was cool and detached. "Is this a message from Mr. Andy Read?"

"No, no!" Mr. Pinkerton said hastily, and could have kicked himself when it was too late, and he saw the quick hurt look in her grey eyes. That was his cue. If he had only had the sense to say yes!

"I'm glad of that," she said icily. "Though offhand I can't think of any other reason that would give you the right to take such an extraordinary interest in my private affairs."

Mr. Pinkerton laboured to pull himself together and rally.

"I'm . . . I'm very sorry," he stammered. "You see——"

"I see perfectly. And I wish you good morning. I shall marry Mr. Sellers at once. We are going to France—if that interests you . . . or Mr. Read. And you can tell Mr. Read that he'd best confine his attentions to Paris and to Belgian brewers' daughters. They're his type."

Mr. Pinkerton looked at her oddly for an instant. For the first time in his life probably, he felt a sudden wave of violent wrath. He clutched his brown bowler firmly in both hands and bowed stiffly, as they did in the pictures.

"Andy Read said he guessed he . . . he was just another sap," he said, just as icily as Miss Farrell. "And that you were using him as a . . . a come-on for this . . . this man. And I expect he's right. As a friend of his, I'm very glad indeed to see he's escaped as heartless and . . . unpleasant a young woman as . . . as it's been my fortune to see. I think it serves you jolly well right . . . to marry a man that doesn't give a fig for you, except to assure himself an income."

Mr. Pinkerton blinked angrily at the astonished girl.

"Oh, dear!" he thought suddenly, "what *am* I saying?"

He stepped backward toward the door. But Linda Farrell, instead of picking up the vase of purple asters on the little table and chucking it at him, stood there looking at him, her lips parted, her eyes wide and bewildered.

"You . . . you've no right to say that!" she whispered, her anger quite swallowed up in hurt surprise.

"*Right!*" Mr. Pinkerton exclaimed, suddenly reassured. "It's true!"

"I . . . I know it's true," Linda said. It was said as simply, and plaintively, as a little child would have said it. "I said *you* had no right to say it."

Mr. Pinkerton stared.

"At least he's a gentleman. He doesn't make love to me one moment and make fun of me the next. That's what *your* friend does."

"Nothing of the sort!" Mr. Pinkerton said hotly. "He doesn't either! Just because he's afraid you were stupid enough, for all I can see, to follow Nurse Jessop out on the cliff and push her . . ."

His voice died away. Linda's face turned suddenly chalk-white. Then it turned hotly red and her wide-set eyes flashed.

"Is . . . is *that* what he said I did?"

Her cheeks were flaming.

Mr. Pinkerton recoiled. "Oh no, no!" he cried desperately. "*He* didn't say any such thing! *I* was——"

She took a step toward him. He took another step backward.

"Then he must have implied it! And he's not the only one that's lucky I didn't marry him! I might have known the sort of person he is!"

Her grey eyes were black with anger. Her face was white again except for the two spots burning along her high cheek-bones.

"At least I know where I stand with Quentin Sellers! He knows I know he'd not think of marrying me if it weren't for Mrs. Isom's money! His being in love with me is a polite fiction—and fictions don't hurt anybody if they *know* they're fictions! And *he* doesn't think I pushed anybody off a cliff! I do him as much service as he does me, and then we can each take our money and go our own way. As for Andrew Read, you can tell him I'm grateful to him for teaching me a lesson. I'm lucky to have been mixed up with fire without getting burnt! You can thank him for me. And tell him I'm sorry I ever thought I could interest anybody that's been about as much as he has! Good-bye, Mr. . . . Mr. Pinkerton!"

Linda Farrell flashed out of the room and slammed the door behind her.

Mr. Pinkerton stared after her for some time, took a long unhappy breath, looked aimlessly about him, sat down on the end of the sofa, and blinked nervously into space.

"Oh . . . *oh, mercy!*" he said to himself.

He moistened his lips and ran his finger round the edge of his collar. Then he adjusted his spectacles and his purple cravat.

"I *have* made a mess of it," he said. He could not remember, offhand, ever having been more miserable, more wretched, more ill-advised, or feeling more futile.

"What shall I do?" he thought. "What an extraordinary young . . . young devil she is. Whatever will Andy Read say? Whatever shall I tell him?"

He moved to the centre of the sofa. The thought came to him that it would have been enormously better if he had never come to Brighton at all. Of course, he had thought that more than once.

He sat there, staring at the heavy blue velvet furniture, the high shelves of books and the high gilt mirror over the mantel.

"Money, money!" he thought bitterly.

It was always money. People married people for it. People murdered people for it. If it were not for money, Mrs. Isom, in all probability—so far as he knew—would not have been killed. If it were not for money Linda would not have to marry Quentin Sellers, Quentin Sellers would not want to marry Linda. After they had got it, what good did it do them? What good did it do him, really, to have Mrs. Pinkerton's fortune, except to make him a wretched old busybody, always meddling in other people's business instead of having to make a living in a decent way for himself?

The French clock on the mantel sounded twelve. A tiny silver blow struck unhappily into his mind, and another, and another.

As the twelfth blow pierced, Mr. Pinkerton leaped up off the sofa.

"That is an idea!" he exclaimed, just as it struck.
"That is an *excellent* idea!"

Linda would not have to marry him at all. With all his undoubted superficial merits, there was one very obvious point about Mr. Quentin Sellers. He had one plain weakness; and it was a weakness about which Mr. Pinkerton was well able to do something.

He would buy Mr. Sellers off.

He thought rapidly. He would even use some of the seventy-five thousand pounds, if necessary. But no doubt it would not be necessary at all. He did not use, he had never used, more than a fraction of the income. Mr. Sellers would no doubt be delighted to have a few hundreds, in ready cash, and not have to marry at all. He was not the marrying kind, in any case. He was much too selfish. In fact, it might not even take so much.

Mr. Pinkerton took his large purple handkerchief out of his pocket and mopped his brow.

"I'm sure it's a very good thing to do with money," he said firmly, to reassure himself. Nevertheless, he looked apprehensively over his shoulder, just to make sure Mrs. Pinkerton was not standing there, listening to such blasphemy.

He got up. For a moment he thought of ringing for the maid and asking to see Mr. Sellers, settling it all then and there. A native caution stirred in his bosom. He had best see Andy Read first. If it should turn out, by some desperate chance, that he really did not want to marry Linda Farrell after all, it would be extraordinarily awkward. It was best to make haste slowly.

CHAPTER XXIX

ANDY READ was in his room in the Green Trout. The hearth was littered with cigarette-ends. An ash-tray on the table, beside a bottle of whisky and an empty glass, was also filled with them. Andy Read was pacing back and forth between the table and the fireplace. His trunk and suitcases were pulled out beside the bed. The bed was piled with clothes, golf clubs, shoes, various pieces of old silver, prints, linen, books, and bits of old china . . . much of it, no doubt, Mr. Pinkerton thought, the product of his hours in the Lanes with Linda.

Mr. Pinkerton stood in the doorway surveying a scene as instinct with gloom as any he had witnessed. He looked particularly at the bottle of whisky. It was quite full. In fact, it had not even been opened.

Andy grinned a twisted sardonic grin. "I thought I'd go on a first-class bender, but I don't feel like it. You have a drink."

"No thank you," Mr. Pinkerton said primly.

"Sit down, if you can find a place." He cleared a spot on the bed with a sweep of his arm. "Here."

Mr. Pinkerton sat down.

"Are you . . . going away?"

"Yeh. I'm going to London till your friend Bull says I can go home. Wish to God I'd never come in the first place."

He resumed his pacing across the little room.

Mr. Pinkerton sat there, trying to decide on the best way to proceed with his plan. A cable form lying flung on the littered bed stared him in the face. Without really meaning to, he read it.

"ANDREW READ GREEN TROUT INN BRIGHTON CABLING WILSON MIDDLE TEMPLE COMMUNICATE WITH YOU READY WITH LEGAL ADVICE IF NEEDED STOP KNEW YOU'D GET MIXED UP IN SOMETHING SOONER OR LATER STOP GOOD EXPERIENCE DON'T LET IT GET YOU DOWN STOP COMMUNICATE AMERICAN EXPRESS FOR MONEY STOP CREDIT ARRANGED STOP WILL FLY OVER IF WANTED STOP MARRY GIRL IF YOU WANT TO STOP EXPECTED YOU TO FROM BEGINNING ANYWAY STOP ALL CONFIDENCE AND LOVE DAD."

Mr. Pinkerton blinked. His eyes were suddenly quite misty. This certainly did not sound like a family who had chucked out a black sheep. His heart glowed warmly. It was perfectly obvious to him, now, that something had got to be done.

He cleared his throat.

"I'm afraid Linda is going to marry Quentin Sellers after all," he said. "At once."

"That's swell," Andy said. "Told you she was."

"I don't think it's swell at all," Mr. Pinkerton replied stoutly. "I think it's lousy."

Read grinned.

"So do I, really. I don't see what we can do about it. Do you?"

"I thought maybe . . . maybe you would think of something," Mr. Pinkerton said.

Andy shook his head. "It's her funeral."

Mr. Pinkerton thought that over. "She's only doing it because of her guardian's will, of course," he went on. "She doesn't want to marry him."

Andy Read stopped in his pacing and confronted the grey little man seated bolt upright on the side of the large high brass bed surrounded by garments and assorted oddments.

"Mr. Pinkerton," he said gravely, "some day somebody's going to tell you the facts of life . . . and it might as well be me. Girls don't marry to enable guys

like Sellers to live lives of ease without labour. Not any more they don't. Maybe they did when you were a boy, but not now. They marry for a lot of other reasons. One of 'em is to get money for themselves. That's Linda Farrell. At least I don't see any other reason. He may have a whimsical and lovable character only apparent in the intimate home circle, but he always looked to me like a first-class s.o.b."

"Possibly," Mr. Pinkerton agreed. He was not sure what he was agreeing to, but he did share in a general disapprobation of Mr. Quentin Sellers. "As a matter of fact," he went on daringly, "it's all your fault that she's marrying him."

"My fault, for God's sake!" Read said angrily. Then he grinned and shrugged his broad, lean shoulders. "I'm sorry. I guess I'm cock-eyed. What I mean is, I hadn't realized until you pointed it out that it was my fault."

"You . . . insulted her," Mr. Pinkerton said firmly. The young man stared. "I *what*?"

"Well, you offended her. You said . . . well, you remember. You sort of implied . . . well, you know, when you . . . down there last night in the little room. . . ."

Andy Read continued to stare incredulously for a moment. "Oh," he said then. "Oh. You mean . . . Well, bless my soul! Well, for . . . Well, well! What a break, finding *that* out before it was too late."

Mr. Pinkerton was puzzled. Things were not going as he had hoped.

"Look here," Andy said abruptly. "We went to that house, and I asked for her. She wouldn't come down. I, like a sap, figured it was because that guy Noakes wasn't delivering the message. So—you may remember—I climbed up there from the back, with some idea of being a young Lochinvar. And what did I see?"

Mr. Pinkerton, who had never been able to imagine

what he had seen—much to his distress and bewilderment—listened avidly.

“Why, a first-class family row, with Linda and the nurse and Sellers all in the ring together. What we call a battle royal, Mr. Pinkerton.”

“What . . . what about?”

“Why . . . something about the unpleasant dust-up in Spain,” Andy Read said.

Mr. Pinkerton understood gradually that this was another way of saying that that was one of the things Mr. Read wasn't telling.

“Then I go out on the cliff for a walk, pretty sore. But you can't stay sore when you're out with nothing but sky and sea and the Downs around, because . . .”

He tossed a half-smoked cigarette at the hearth.

“I mean, when you're out with nothing but all that around you, things scale down to where they belong. It's sort of a catharsis, like the Greeks thought you got out of a great play, I guess. Anyway, that's the effect that space and silence have on *me*.”

He lighted another cigarette.

“I mean, it didn't matter if Linda was two-timing me. I decided maybe she couldn't help it. I walked out to Rottingdean and back. I wrote her a crazy letter in the dark.”

He kicked a bit of ash on the hearth with the toe of his brown shoe.

“Then I . . . met her. God knows what she was doing out on the cliff at that time of night. She was crying. I gathered friend Sellers had taken a little too much for granted. Well, I wanted to smash his pasty face, naturally.”

“Why . . . why didn't you?” Mr. Pinkerton inquired.

“He wasn't anywhere around,” Andy said simply.

“Well, we walked up past that big school's cabbage-patch. We passed that young couple you saw, or some young couple—I guess it was them—and we started back. I thought she ought to be in bed. She was nervy,

all of a sudden—afraid to let me go back with her, made me promise not to follow her. I didn't. I wish to God I had. When I came back and saw you, I thought it was her, down there on the concrete. I guess I didn't know how much she'd . . . got mixed up with everything inside me, till then."

He stood, hands in his pockets, staring moodily down at the litter on the hearth.

"When I went up after the police, I phoned the house first and got hold of Miss Arnold. She said Linda was in bed. Then she went and looked and said she wasn't. She was pretty scared. I told her we'd been out together, that Jessop was dead at the bottom of the cliff. She said if I could find Linda she'd let her in the back way."

"And you did find her?"

Read nodded.

"I phoned the police. Then I found her. She was hiding, scared stiff, over by the works across the road. She was scared to go back to the house. I told her to wait and I'd give her a signal. I went back to the house when they took Jessop's body off, but I couldn't shake Noakes. I told him Jessop was dead and for him to wake everybody. He didn't seem able to get it, just stood there goggling at me. You and Bull came then."

Mr. Pinkerton thought intensely.

"How did you happen to . . . to have her nightdress, I mean?"

"Miss Arnold," Andy said. "She'd stowed it under a cushion in the room there. She gave Linda a signal when she came down to get the whisky."

"Then everybody in the house knew Nurse Jessop was dead, really? Except the Colonel and Mr. Evill?"

"They may all have known it as far as I know. I don't know about it. I couldn't tell you about Sellers. Or any of 'em. I don't like the fellow, but I haven't got any way of knowing he knew it."

"He . . . he lied about being out," Mr. Pinkerton

said. "Inspector Bull's man saw him leave the house and wait for her, just down the road."

Read nodded. "Naturally he'd lie, then. He knew by that time she was dead, whether he'd known it before the police got there or not."

"Somebody else saw them go together too," Mr. Pinkerton said. "Somebody on the balcony. The policeman in the square saw that too."

Andy Read looked up, his face intensely concerned.

"Man or woman?"

"He couldn't make out."

Read bit his lips, in much the way, Mr. Pinkerton thought, that Inspector Bull chewed his moustache. He lighted another cigarette, puffed at it twice and threw it away.

"What time was that?" he asked.

"They went out at 9.40, or just after," Mr. Pinkerton said.

Read's face cleared. "That was nearly an hour before she fell."

He came over to the bed and put his hand on the shoulder of the little man sitting there.

"Mr. Pinkerton," he said. "If you repeat any of this I'll deny it . . . under oath. Do you understand that?"

Mr. Pinkerton nodded, moistening his lips. He remembered again what Amelia Arnold had said on Monday morning in front of the Octopus in the Aquarium, about this young man's breaking every bone in his body. He was prepared to believe it was quite possible.

"Oh, I understand perfectly," he said.

Andy Read went over to the window and stood staring out for a long time. Mr. Pinkerton could see that he was badly upset. He got up. As he did so he looked at the door. He was quite sure that under the sill he could see a shadow outside moving abruptly away.

It was a much perplexed and disturbed Mr. Pinkerton

who came out of the Green Trout. The idea of buying off Quentin Sellers still seemed to him the sound, if rather bizarre—and certainly rather expensive—thing to do. And, if Linda Farrell was planning actually to go with him on a night boat to France, that very night, there was need for some despatch in the matter.

If, on the other hand, the fear that was obviously gnawing at Andy Read's heart had any truth in it . . . if by some dreadful chance it had been Linda Farrell who had done away with her guardian, perhaps her rival too, in the cold-blooded way in which they had been done away with . . . then there was no need at all for haste.

Mr. Pinkerton shook his head disconsolately. The idea that Linda Farrell might have murdered one or both of those women might have been utterly incredible to a hardened policeman like the Chief Constable of South Sussex or Inspector Bull of New Scotland Yard. It seemed quite reasonable to the little Welshman. A timid and gentle person himself, it had never seemed odd to him in the least that timid and gentle people could be driven by constant goading, or cruelty and derision, or unremitting and eternal neglect, into a sudden unbelievable outburst of violence and bloodshed. It had not seemed strange to him when the sweet-faced curate of St. Botolph Under-the-Fields had strangled the vicar's wife, who as a matter of fact must have been much like Mrs. Isom, he thought. Nor had he been able to share Bull's surprise when the wife of the junior master had taken a meat cleaver to her mother-in-law on being told for the hundred-and-twentieth—and last—time that the breakfast tea tasted of soap.

No, thinking about it, it would be unfortunate but not incomprehensible if Linda Farrell, worn to a fine line of exhaustion and despair by the dark stuffy rooms of the house in Sussex Square, the nurse's innuendoes, Mr. Sellers's carryings-on, her guardian's nagging sus-

picious surveillance, and at the same time intoxicated by the sudden wonder of having an attractive young man head over ears in love with her, had . . . Mr. Pinkerton shrugged his narrow shoulders. She would not be the first pretty young girl who had killed. History was full of them. And the point, of course, was that one should hesitate about investing heavily in her future until one was a little surer that she was to have a future.

He stood in the doorway of the Green Trout, looking out across the Front to the grey forbidding sea. It had stopped raining at last and the wind had gone down, but the white-crested waves still rolled high against the shore and the air was distinctly chilly.

The porter touched him on the arm.

"The Inspector said you're to please meet him at Happy's Oyster Dive, sir, for a bite of lunch, if I should see you before half-past one."

CHAPTER XXX

INSPECTOR BULL was perched, like some gigantic bird of tawny plumage and great solidity, on one of the high stools at the fishily immaculate counter in the small establishment on the beach, under the Sea Front and just opposite and below the Green Trout. Along the counter small dishes of whelks, cockles, prawns and eels bordered a large bed of parsley in which nestled bright lobsters and dull-flushed crabs. The pleasantly pungent odour of vinegar and sauce made Mr. Pinkerton's mouth pleasantly moist. The proprietor, whose noted house, Mr. Pinkerton observed, also purveyed bread, butter, tea and stout, was leaning, broad, red-faced and genial, over the counter talking to Inspector Bull. Bull was at the moment washing down the last of a large crab with a creamy-headed glass of stout of handsome proportions, and nodding sagely.

"Now, I sye, every man looks at things accordin' to 'is lights an' pahst experience. Now, you'll sye, wot's yer lights, wot's yer pahst experience? I'll sye, well, I deals in fish . . . like you deals in murder. You'll sye, yer see nothink similar hin the two; but I'll sye, that's w'ere yer wrong, guv'ner."

The proprietor wiped his hands, took twopence from a boatman, and continued.

"It's wot y'might call hanalogy. Now, tyke the conger heel. You'll sye, conger heel, wot's 'e got to do with murder—nothink! I'll sye, wyte a mo'. The conger heel, wot does 'e do? 'E lives in a dark pleasant sort of 'ole among the rocks side by side with 'is friend the lobster."

He picked up a lobster, dangled it for a moment in

front of Inspector Bull's solemn face, and dropped it back into its green bed of feathery herbs.

"Mytey, that's wot they are, as mytey as fish can be. All's well, till one fine d'y brother lobster sheds 'is shell, an' out pops mister heel an' gobbles 'im down. An' I sye, if that ain't murder, wot is?"

He stood back, his red hands on his ample white-aproned middle.

Bull nodded soberly. "There's something in what you say," he said.

Mr. Pinkerton seated himself beside him on a high stool and demolished a large cup of tea and six small dishes of cockles and three of whelks. He thought over Happy's analogy. It hardly seemed to him that Marie Louise Isom could legitimately be compared to a lobster that had shed her shell. Or Nurse Jessop, for that matter. Of all the people he had known, they had both of them seemed to be encased in shells of the most adamant hardness. However, according to the analogy, the conger eel murderer waits till the hard-shelled victim discards. It might conceivably be that Mrs. Isom and Nurse Jessop had been temporarily shell-less at the moment they had been swallowed up . . . and like the unfortunate lobster, at the moment entirely powerless in the hands of someone who had been waiting and watching, watching and waiting, for that one defenceless instant.

Mr. Pinkerton ate another dish of mussels for twopence. It wanted thinking out.

After they had lunched, Inspector Bull and Mr. Pinkerton went along the rocky deserted beach, got themselves two deck-chairs and settled themselves snugly away from the still bleak wind against the upturned sides of the *Margy Grace IV* of Southampton. Bull lighted his pipe. He said nothing until he had got it going and thrown away a boxful of burned matches. He then said, very comfortably, "Now, Pinkerton, let's get all this straightened out properly."

Mr. Pinkerton took a long rueful breath. He could easily, of course, he knew, realize what was coming.

"To show you what I mean," Inspector Bull said, quite as if he thought Mr. Pinkerton did not already know most acutely, "I had the bits of glass—watch crystal, Johnson said it was—tested by a chap here. I also found a piece about a quarter of an inch square some distance from the body. It had been thrown out toward the sea and hit the wall. He tested that too. It wasn't Nurse Jessop's watch crystal, of course. It was part of a lens for an eye with 80/100 refraction."

He went on calmly, not looking at Mr. Pinkerton.

"When they did the p.m. on Jessop, they couldn't account for marks in the skin of her right forefinger or the palm of her right hand. It looked to Thurston as if she'd been clutching a bit of twine, about one-eighth of an inch thick. Silk, probably, because it had made a deep indentation without any abrasion."

Mr. Pinkerton looked down at the gravelly beach.

"It was clear that she'd got something of that nature in her hand when she fell, that it was clutched for some time in her hand after she had died, and that it was then removed," Bull went on. "The puzzling thing about it was that it didn't occur to me, at once, there was anybody about who'd have an interest in shielding anybody that wears an eyeglass attached to a silk cord. So I had them take the finger-prints. Not hers, but the ones I figured could be left on her finger-nails—she varnished them, you remember—if anyone had touched them getting the cord out. They phoned back from the Yard at 11.58."

They sat there in opposite fields of silence for a moment. Mr. Pinkerton put his hand in his waistcoat-pocket, took out the black silk cord with the tell-tale bits of glass and cloth at either end, and put it in Inspector Bull's open palm.

"Thanks very much," Bull said soberly.

"You . . . you're quite welcome," Mr. Pinkerton said mechanically.

"Colonel Isom," Bull remarked, "says he lost it. He noticed just this morning that the buttonhole of his yellow waistcoat had been torn out."

He examined the cord for some time. Then he retrieved his matchbox, emptied out the used matches, and stowed it, with the cord safely inside, in his pocket.

"Why did you do it?" he asked then, eyeing the contrite little man in the chair beside him.

Mr. Pinkerton became uncomfortably hot, not so much because he had done it as because, think as he would, he really had no explanation.

"I . . . I actually don't know," he said unhappily. "It just seemed, somehow, the thing I . . . I had to do. It didn't seem to matter, to her. She was dead. She'd made a lot of nice people suffer. I——"

Bull's face became almost grim for an instant.

"It matters when any murderer succeeds, Pinkerton," he said. "Not for Mrs. Isom and Jessop. But for the next, and the next."

"I . . . I know," Mr. Pinkerton said meekly. "I'm sorry. I don't really know why I did do it."

Inspector Bull's face softened.

"I'll tell you, some time," he said.

Mr. Pinkerton stared at him, not sure that he had heard. There was no change of expression on Bull's large red face.

"Now let's see," Bull said. "I thought you would have some other private information you'd not got round to giving me. So, I'll just put you up to date on what I've been doing."

Mr. Pinkerton flushed with shame. It was like Bull to overlook with such magnanimity an outrageous bit of inexcusable perfidy.

"I searched Jessop's room again this morning. I'd had it locked last night. I'd searched it before, and as a matter of fact again last night after you found her.

Between that last search then, and my search this morning, in spite of the fact that the room was locked, a number of things had been changed."

Mr. Pinkerton listened eagerly.

"And for one thing, I found the black leather envelope that Evill identifies as the one she put the money in when he gave it to her. It was under her mattress. It hadn't been there at one o'clock this morning."

Mr. Pinkerton sat bolt upright in his chair.

"Also," Inspector Bull continued, "it had your finger-prints on it too. Nobody else's."

He looked over in mild inquiry.

"I . . . I picked it up," Mr. Pinkerton said apologetically. "Just to . . . look at it. It was in the chest under the stairs in the entrance hall."

"When?"

"It was when I went downstairs, last night, when you were talking to Mr. Evill and Mr. Sellers and all of them, in the library."

Bull nodded. "When you went down to see your friend Read."

"Yes," Mr. Pinkerton said. "And by the way, he's no black sheep that's been disowned by his family at all. I saw a cablegram——"

Bull nodded again. "I saw it," he said. "He's got a very nice father."

"He's very nice himself," Mr. Pinkerton said stoutly.

"It usually works out that way," Bull observed. He had a small son himself who was very nice.

An idea occurred to Mr. Pinkerton. "You know, Inspector," he said, "this man Noakes, now."

Bull knocked out his pipe on the side of *Margy Grace IV* and put it in his pocket.

"I'd been wondering about him, even before Mrs. Howie told me how thick he and Nurse Jessop were. About that Tuesday morning in the Pavilion Parade, when I first saw him."

"What about it?" Bull asked.

"You see, I was standing there when they drove up, in the Rolls. And Mrs. Isom kept demanding what she was doing there again, and all that, and when Nurse Jessop pushed her away, just the way she didn't want to go, the chairman said she was a cool one, and Noakes said she'd got to be, dealing with that old . . . old bitch. That's what he said."

Mr. Pinkerton hurried on.

"Now, you're not allowed to park there where they were. I've been wondering what happened to Noakes?"

He looked earnestly at the Inspector.

"If he took the car and parked it in Palace Place, say, he could have nipped through the kitchen door the way Colonel Isom went out, or even over the wall along the front and into the window, and killed her, and taken the money."

Bull thought a moment. "It brings up the point about the kitchen door again," he said seriously. "I told you I thought that might be at the heart of all this. How did it get unlocked?"

Mr. Pinkerton had a second idea.

"Nurse Jessop, of course," he said. "She slipped along there and put it on the latch. That's why she left the old lady, really."

Bull nodded. "It could be," he said. "Unfortunately, only one person was seen out there in the Pavilion gardens. Not at Palace Place but at the other end, the north end of the Pavilion, not very far from the Music Room."

"Who?"

"Miss Linda Farrell."

It took Mr. Pinkerton some time to recover from that. "But don't you really think, in view of Steve Burkett's evidence that Noakes and Jessop were together at Sexton Old Bridge, and that one or both of them stole things there, at least according to him—Noakes might have been in this *with* Jessop? And then, wanting to

keep the money and what not for himself, and also keep her from peaching on him probably . . .”

“There’s one other thing we’ve found out,” Bull said slowly.

Mr. Pinkerton leaned forward to catch it, above the roar of a large wave just breaking on the beach.

“She was his wife. Of course, that doesn’t show he didn’t kill her. There’s no reason, however, so far, to think the two of them weren’t working together closely, whatever their game may have been. It may have been that five thousand. I don’t know. They may have got it. I don’t think he killed her.”

“I suppose,” Mr. Pinkerton said, when he had digested that news, “that it would have been very different if it had been him that was shoved over the cliff . . . what with both Colonel Isom and Mr. Sellers interested in her.”

A wintery smile showed for an instant in Bull’s troubled eyes. “It wasn’t, however,” he said simply.

They went up a few minutes later toward the Town Hall in Bartholomews. “The thing that bothers me the most,” Mr. Pinkerton said, when they had crossed King’s Road, “is Linda Farrell. She and Andy Read have had a quarrel, and it’s——”

“It’s none of your business,” Bull finished.

Mr. Pinkerton flushed.

“Oh, I know that,” he said quickly. “Still, she’s a nice girl, and she . . . she shouldn’t have to choose between marrying Mr. Sellers or starving, or being a shop assistant.”

“Lots of young women are shop assistants.”

“Lots of them starve,” said Mr. Pinkerton. “I just thought if she had a chance . . . I mean, I don’t think Sellers will even . . . even treat her decently. I’m sure he doesn’t really want to marry her.”

Bull looked at him as they went along.

“And what had you planned to do about it?” he asked suspiciously.

Mr. Pinkerton flushed still more deeply. "Well," he stammered, "you see, I . . . as you know, of course, I've . . . I've got a good bit of money that I never use."

Bull stared.

"It's just sort of lying idle, accumulating, and I . . . I sort of thought I'd . . ."

Bull stopped in his tracks and looked down at him.

Mr. Pinkerton swallowed. "I thought I'd buy him off," he managed to say. "I know it sounds awfully——"

"You thought you'd . . . buy him off," Inspector Bull repeated mechanically. He looked at Mr. Pinkerton with what in anyone else would have been a stare of dumbfounded amazement.

Mr. Pinkerton nodded quickly.

"You see," he said, "I . . . I don't use the money at all, and Mr. Sellers is obviously a very venal person, and of course, they're going to France on the night boat——"

Then Inspector Bull did stare. "*Are they?*" he said dryly.

"They may have gone al——"

Mr. Pinkerton gave a sudden giggle. Inspector Bull had disappeared abruptly, clearing Little East Street in three strides.

CHAPTER XXXI

MR. PINKERTON trotted after him. An old country saying that he had not thought of for a long time came into his mind. There are more ways of killing a horse than choking him to death with butter. It was surprising, when he came to think about it. That was exactly what he had been about to do. With Mrs. Pinkerton's butter at that.

Bull was putting the telephone down when Mr. Pinkerton opened the door and peered cautiously into the Chief Constable's room. His face was very sober as he nodded to Mr. Pinkerton to sit down. He went out. Mr. Pinkerton waited, trying to listen to the deep rumble of voices beyond the door. After a bit Bull came back, and behind him, in a moment, a clerk entered, ushering in the late Mrs. Isom's solicitor, Mr. Marius Evill.

"Sit down, Mr. Evill," Bull said. "Several new points have come up here, and we've got to change our point of view. Perhaps you wouldn't mind repeating your account of just what you did and saw in the Pavilion on Tuesday morning."

The London solicitor sat down. He nodded affably. The strawberry mark on his temple burned an angry red.

"If you're trying to make me contradict myself, Inspector," he said with a short laugh, "you're simply wasting your time and mine. I'm a solicitor only because I thought I'd do better at that than I would as a K.C."

Mr. Pinkerton secretly raised his brows. Bull nodded politely. "I've no doubt of it, sir. No, I simply want the information, to try to adjust it. You naturally have nothing——"

"I have nothing to fear, Inspector, nothing," Mr. Evill said with some annoyance.

"Right, sir. Mrs. Isom called you on the telephone——"

Evill sighed resignedly and bent himself to it. The little man in his seat by the door listened intently, not understanding but entranced always by this sort of thing.

"Saturday night. She said she was sending me a communication by hand the next day. On Sunday Amelia Arnold came with the communication—carefully tied and sealed. She came early, and came into my chambers while I read the letter. Which, of course, you have. She wanted five thousand pounds in cash."

"You've no notion what for?"

"For no particular purpose," Mr. Evill said. "She had a mania for actual money. She kept money by her whenever she could. I . . . I haven't said this before, but I had more than once thought she was more than slightly touched. I had no right to dictate to her in any way, of course; nevertheless, I planned, on this occasion, very definitely to get in touch with her physician here and attempt to have some control placed over her, for the Colonel's sake. Nor have I admitted this before: I had heard of the detective she'd hired. I thought that also was part and parcel of a weakening hold."

"How did you hear about the detective?"

"Fox and Leach," Evill said shortly. "They're an agency off Shaftesbury Avenue. They called on me to see if she was financially responsible. She'd given my name. They didn't of course say what she wanted them to do. Still, as they do only one thing. . . ."

Bull nodded his comprehension.

"She wanted the money on Tuesday. I came down, as you know, early. I got there before she was up. I had breakfast with Nurse Jessop, at which time I made my very stupid error."

"How many people, Mr. Evill," Bull asked, "knew that you brought that money with you?"

"I knew it. Mrs. Isom. Nurse Jessop."

Mr. Evill looked uncomfortable.

"Frankly, Colonel Isom knew it too. As a matter of fact, Inspector, I told him. It may have been culpable. But remember, if you please, that I was planning to consult with a physician later in the day. Colonel Isom is a man of integrity. I wasn't aware, I should add, that he had taken to drink again. He was her husband. I consulted with him. Laid all my cards, so to speak, on the table."

Mr. Pinkerton wondered.

"You didn't, by any chance," Bull asked, "consult with Mr. Quentin Sellers, also?"

Mr. Evill flushed.

"No, no," he said, with annoyance. "However, I'd presume Nurse Jessop did. They seemed most intimate. Which I was not aware of at the time."

"You left the house then shortly after Mrs. Isom?"

"Before. I called at Doctor Rallston Harrow's in Marlborough Buildings. He was not in. That is why I stepped over to the Pavilion, to pass the time looking at the collection of prints. He was to be back, I was informed, at 12 o'clock."

Mr. Evill sighed again, rather impatiently, and leaned forward in his chair.

"Now please get all this very carefully, Inspector. I paid my sixpence, went into the Pavilion, looked at the dragons painted to resemble the grain of the wood in the door panels in the Red Drawing-room, and went thence, after some time, to the kitchens. I did not, at any time, see Mrs. Isom, or have the least idea she was there. I saw Nurse Jessop and Mr. Sellers upstairs, in one of the small rooms. I saw Miss Arnold when she came upstairs to hunt for the nurse, and I saw the American, who must have come up as Miss Arnold was going down again. I myself was examining Her Majesty's collection of boxes in the centre room at the time. Miss Arnold passed into the East Room with the

uniforms and the coach in it. Mr. Read came into the room I was in. He looked extremely distraught, and went immediately through the small rooms to the west. How he managed to miss Nurse Jessop and Sellers, if he did so manage, I don't know. And I was still there, in that centre room, when the commotion broke out downstairs."

Bull nodded. "You did not at any time see Mrs. Isom?"

"No, Inspector," Mr. Evill repeated patiently.

"And when you left the Pavilion where did you go?—Between the time you left, and the time you arrived here, in this office?"

Mr. Evill thought. "I went to the post office, sent a telegram, and came directly here."

"Nowhere else, sir?"

"No."

"You didn't stop at a stationer's in North Street?"

Evill clucked impatiently.

"Oh yes. As a matter of fact I did. To buy a notebook. In view of what had happened, I thought I'd best put down the relevant facts. I'm a methodical man, Inspector. You're likely to forget things if you don't do something of the sort.—As, for instance, I'd forgotten that."

"Very well, sir. Did you know, or have any idea, that Mrs. Isom had the five thousand pounds with her at the Pavilion?"

The strawberry mark glowed ominously. Mr. Evill was much annoyed.

"Of course not. How should I have done?"

"Then about this evening, sir."

"Well, I've explained all that too, Inspector. I withdrew after dinner to my room. The situation in the house has never been pleasant for me. I disapprove of the people Mrs. Isom surrounded herself with."

Bull looked his question.

"Oh, this person Sellers chiefly. He's nothing more nor less than an adventurer."

"Why do you say that?"

"Well, I say it because it's true."

Mr. Evill was a little amused. He chuckled.

"I say it because I have reason to believe that large sums of the money that Mrs. Isom's been converting into cash in the last years have directly and indirectly found their way into Sellers's pocket. How else could he have dropped a cool thousand at Newmarket last year?"

Mr. Pinkerton, in his chair by the door, listened to that with some agitation. The idea of buying such a man off, and so having Mrs. Pinkerton's money squandered on horses, was unnerving.

"And of course, Inspector, you've discovered that her husband has always objected to my—may I say?—very salutary influence over her. It was I who convinced her of the necessity of sending him to Doctor Mason Kelly's sanatorium at Bognor Regis when he became a pronounced alcoholic some years ago."

Bull made squares and circles on the desk pad.

"How long was he detained?"

"Three months at that time, I believe. He has been back, a number of times. Of course it was difficult, because he became convinced that there was a conspiracy between myself and his wife—later between his wife and Sellers—to put him away permanently."

"You're quite sure—in the case of Mrs. Isom and Mr. Sellers—that his fears were groundless?"

The colour burned in the strawberry mark. Mr. Evill smiled and shook his head.

"That's a difficult question, Inspector. I think I might even say it's an unfair question. In fact, I think I refuse to answer it."

He gave the impression of a man tottering on the brink of temptation, and refusing with a tremendous effort to fall over. Mr. Pinkerton, glancing cautiously over, caught the amused flicker in Bull's eyes. Mr. Pinkerton could see that to refuse to answer some questions was to answer them completely.

"I refuse," Evill went on slowly, "because I know I'm prejudiced against Sellers. I should find it very difficult, very, to be fair to him. I . . . I might even convince myself that I believe he would not have been at all averse to having the Colonel permanently detained from home. I prefer not to commit myself."

The birthmark darkened again, as Mr. Pinkerton watched it with covert fascination. It was plain that Mr. Evill, having rejected the temptation to speak his mind openly about Quentin Sellers, was proceeding to do it in spite of himself.

"The fact that Mrs. Isom withdrew the first large sum from her estate when Colonel Isom was at Bognor Regis may have been pure accident. The fact that he was there again when she bought that ridiculously expensive car may be irrelevant too. As a matter of fact, it was usually Sellers who brought Mrs. Isom's instructions to me . . . and I may say he always seemed familiar with their content. I frequently felt, also, that he was goading me into refusing to obey Mrs. Isom's instructions, in order to get her to put someone more pliable in charge of her affairs."

Mr. Evill's lips closed tightly. He certainly looked anything but pliable, Mr. Pinkerton thought.

"And last night?" Bull asked politely.

Mr. Evill brought himself back to the present.

"Ah yes. After dinner I read the family the terms of Mrs. Isom's will."

He patted his brow with a neatly folded grey handkerchief.

"My word, Inspector, you would have thought I personally had dictated the will. They were like . . . animals. Sellers practically accused me of altering certain provisions which he said he knew were in the will. Mrs. Isom had distinctly contracted with him that in return for his unremitting service and attendance he was to have a thousand a year for life with no strings attached."

"As it is, he and Miss Farrell will get a thousand together, if they marry?"

"If there is that much, Inspector."

Unless Mr. Pinkerton, staring avidly at him, was mistaken, Mr. Evill suddenly gave a saturnine grin. But it was unthinkable in so pompous and respectable a man. It might have been merely the sudden burst of an unfamiliar sunbeam through the big window facing him.

"Linda Farrell I feel sorry for. Also Miss Arnold, though I imagine she expected no more. In fact, I happen to know that she knew what she'd got to expect. Mrs. Isom used to amuse herself by telling people how much she was leaving them, and in her account the amount was sometimes larger than she'd got any idea of actually leaving. Miss Arnold would have been deceived if it had not been for me. It was a breach of confidence. I thought she had the right to know that it would be fifty pounds a year, not two hundred. She might be counting on it."

"And the others?"

"That was their business," Evill said curtly. "They're able to take care of themselves."

Bull nodded. "And after you went to your room?"

"I wrote a memorandum or two, read for a while, and retired."

"Did you hear us when we came?"

"No. The only thing I heard, as a matter of fact, was the telephone ringing, waking me, about a quarter to one."

"Where is your room, Mr. Evill?"

"In the back of the house, next to Sellers's. Miss Arnold is on the other side of him. It was Miss Arnold getting up to answer the telephone that waked me."

"Would you know if Sellers was awakened too?"

"I heard his door open, and close again some little time later."

"You got the impression that he was listening to the conversation at the telephone?"

Evill looked at Inspector Bull steadily. "As a matter of fact, Inspector, that's exactly the impression I did get. I should not myself have mentioned it."

"Do you happen to know, now that we're on the subject, when Sellers went to bed?"

"No. I am a fairly sound sleeper, normally. I heard nothing, last night, until the combination of the telephone and Miss Arnold's door closing none too gently awakened me."

"When did you switch off your light, Mr. Evill?"

"Some time round 10 o'clock." The solicitor smiled dryly. "I had had a strenuous day."

Bull pushed back his chair.

"Thank you, Mr. Evill. You'll be in Brighton to-day and to-morrow, I expect. If you're uncomfortable at Colonel Isom's, you might move to an hotel. There'll be plenty of vacancies if this weather holds on."

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CHAPTER XXXII

INSPECTOR BULL closed the door behind Mr. Marius Evill and went over to the window. He stood there, watching the solicitor's short fleshy figure until it disappeared into Little East Street. He came back to the Chief Constable's desk and picked up his hat.

"It would be interesting to know who it was first suggested sending Colonel Isom to Bognor Regis," he remarked. "I'd understood from the Colonel it was his own idea."

He put on his hat. "Come along, Pinkerton. We're going to town."

Mr. Pinkerton, wondering at himself, hesitated. It was the first time in his years of association with the big tawny man that the prospect of a trip with him had not seemed the most alluring idea in the world.

"Come along, man," Bull said. "She can't get away. I've made sure of that."

"But he can," Mr. Pinkerton said.

"Not far."

Mr. Pinkerton put on his bowler and followed. It was not till some hours later that he understood they were not speaking of the same man at all.

They took places at a small table in the Brighton Belle and were soon flying through the dun-coloured landscape. They were the only people in the carriage. Bull stared moodily out of the window, his head sunk forward on his chest, chewing slowly at the end of his moustache. Mr. Pinkerton once more watched the rabbits in the fields scurrying to their holes in the hedges. He also kept an eye on Bull. He had no idea why they were going to London, but he could tell—and with a vague but gnawing sense of dismay, almost

—that Inspector Bull was fairly satisfied, in his mind, with the way things were working out.

“If I had stayed with him,” he thought ruefully, “I should have known all about it.” It was true, of course, that he wouldn’t have known about Andy Read and Linda.

“Colonel Isom is a very strange man,” he said tentatively.

“Very,” Bull said, without looking up.

“I was sure I saw him peeping at us, last night, when you were looking out on to the balcony, and he was supposed to be asleep.”

He looked at Bull to see how that bit of information would strike him.

Bull nodded calmly, looking back into the car. “I thought he’d been awake some time before Noakes touched him. I shouldn’t be surprised if lying doggo wasn’t one of his specialities.”

“Do you think he’s . . . definitely queer?”

Mr. Pinkerton hastened on. “I mean, isn’t it a common delusion to think that people are trying to have you certified, and put away permanently in sanatoriums?”

Bull smiled a little. “Colonel Isom’s as sane as you or I. Saner than one of us, I fancy. No, if he thought Sellers and his wife were trying to have him put away, my guess would be that he was right. I’m not sure he did think so. Mr. Evill is what they call a special pleader.”

He filled his pipe methodically and lighted it.

“One of the things that’s worrying Mr. Evill most, at the moment, is that he told Nurse Jessop he’d brought Mrs. Isom that money. It might be rather awkward for him.”

“How so?”

“I don’t quite know. He seems to think so.”

The train flew past the roofs of Purley.

“It . . . seemed to me that Colonel Isom was acting

very oddly in the Pavilion on Tuesday morning," Mr. Pinkerton remarked. He tried to have the air of a man who did not want to be offensive, but who knew that facts were facts and that something was due to them.

Bull nodded. "I don't doubt it at all," he said placidly. "He's an extremely odd man. But, my dear chap, England is full of odd people. More than that: the Brighton Pavilion was full of 'em on Tuesday morning. Everybody there, except yourself, was doing something pretty odd. You weren't far from being odd, as far as that goes."

"I . . . I know," Mr. Pinkerton replied. "Still, while there may be a great many odd people about, you don't find their eyeglasses in the hands of dead women at the bottom of cliffs all over England."

"No," Bull admitted soberly. "That's true." He chewed his moustache as he usually did when he was trying to think. "Quite true. Colonel Isom——"

"And everybody in England—I mean, everybody that's odd—hadn't got so good a motive for killing Mrs. Isom as he'd got," Mr. Pinkerton went on doggedly.

Bull looked quizzically at him.

"I mean, freedom from a wife like that and all the restrictions she'd put on him. An income of his own, and all that."

"And Nurse Jessop to marry, I suppose."

Mr. Pinkerton stopped. It was not possible to go as far as that. They had no way of knowing. He wondered if Colonel Isom could have been ignorant of the relationship of his nurse and his butler. Could they have been clever enough to deceive him? Recalling the town gossips whom he had heard after the inquests, Mr. Pinkerton decided that if he had been ignorant of it, he must have been nearly the only person in their immediate neighbourhood who was.

An idea occurred to him.

"Colonel Isom," he said slowly, "whether or not he knew of Nurse Jessop's relations with Noakes, was jealous of her relations with Sellers. He thought she had an appointment, or something, with Sellers in the Pavilion. That's why he was there . . . unless, of course, it was he who murdered Mrs. Isom."

To his surprise Inspector Bull nodded. "I expect you've just about hit it, Pinkerton," he said approvingly.

The offices of Fox and Leach Ltd., Private and Confidential Inquiry Agents—according to the neatly engraved cards that turn up inexplicably on the hall tables of incompatible couples in Mayfair, and are tacked up discreetly with the price list at hairdressers and in wash-rooms at well-known night clubs—were in Prince's Chambers, Middle Turnstile Street, Shaftesbury Avenue. Prince's Chambers, Mr. Pinkerton saw, consisted of one dilapidated high-class cooked meat and sweet shop and depository for the *Matrimonial Chronicle*, and one narrow musty staircase leading to the locked and bolted premises of Addison Levi, dealer in rare and precious Orientalia, on the first floor, and to the tiny glass-doored reception-room of Messrs. Fox and Leach on the second.

Mr. Pinkerton followed the great brown form of his friend and former lodger up the dark littered stairs. It was his first visit to a private investigator. He knew a great deal about such people, from the cinema and from that vast body of literature that turns every unemployed Army officer and retired policeman into a Holmes, rescuing society from the morass of high crime into which Scotland Yard, a nest of Lestrades, abysmally stupid, inept and incompetent, are constantly allowing it to be plunged. He was a little puzzled at the absence of any ostentation on the part of Messrs. Fox and Leach. It looked more like a third-rate dentist's office than the anteroom of a firm that, according to the large chart over the tiny fireplace,

was a bright red spider with filaments of web stretching relentlessly to the remote corners of the world.

The young lady at the desk put down a heavy white teacup with a large brown crack bisecting it, brushed the crumbs of a sultana cake off her blouse, and got up. Mr. Pinkerton saw from the quick look in her prominent blue eyes that she knew at least enough of her employers' business to recognize the large and burly presence of Inspector Bull for what it was.

"Yes, sir?" she said briskly.

"Is your manager in?" Bull asked.

"Yes, sir. Mr. Shrubsole. He's in. I'll just tell him. What name, please?"

Mr. Shrubsole, Mr. Pinkerton could see, also knew his business. His shadowy silhouette darkened the furry ridges of the frosted-glass door marked "Private" before the typist could disentangle herself from the squeaking swivel chair. The door opened.

"Come in, come in," he said. "Ah. Inspector Bull. I know you well. My office is honoured, I am honoured personally and professionally. Come in, come in."

He stood aside.

"I can even guess why you've come. Elementary, sir, elementary."

Mr. Shrubsole's fat face beamed with good humour until Mr. Pinkerton thought he could hear it creaking. His fish-grey eyes were sharp and cautious.

"I take it you've been expecting us," Bull said.

He sat down in the musty leather arm-chair beside Mr. Shrubsole's quite empty desk. Mr. Pinkerton sat down at the door in a plain deal chair. He glanced furtively about. Mr. Shrubsole's room was severely furnished. Besides the articles of furniture that the three of them were using there was a hat stand, a new safe, a battered green filing cabinet, and an empty bookcase. The only decoration in the room was a pair of rusty old-fashioned handcuffs on the mantel, and a large poster over it. On the poster were two large eyes,

one open, one closed. It was captioned "For Our Clients." The implication, Mr. Pinkerton thought, was plain. He wondered if it would not have been franker still if a small bag marked "£" had been placed in the centre.

"I thought it possible," Mr. Shrubsole said. He chuckled agreeably.

"How long have you been here?" Bull asked.

"A year now, Inspector. I bought out the original owners. Myer and Frellson. You may remember them. They had some sort of a dust-up with you people."

"I remember," Bull said.

"But of course that's all past."

Bull nodded soberly. "Do you still publish the *Matrimonial Chronicle and Spinsters' Friend*?" he asked.

"Oh yes!" Mr. Shrubsole said cheerfully. "I hope I always shall. It has brought happi——"

"I'm sure of it," Bull said. "Just so long as it keeps within the law. However, the matter of Mrs. Isom is what I've come about, as you've guessed no doubt."

Mr. Shrubsole's large fat face nodded. It had a slightly mottled appearance, which Mr. Pinkerton supposed might have been caused by Inspector Bull's lack of enthusiasm for Mr. Shrubsole's publication.

"How *did* you guess?" Bull asked.

"I knew you were on the case, Inspector."

Mr. Shrubsole held up his plump hands in a deprecatory gesture.

"After all, it's my client that was killed. You'd expect me to know who's in charge of the case, wouldn't you?"

"I'd have expected you to come forward a bit sooner," Bull remarked.

Shrubsole laughed. "I was just sorting my memoranda to that exact end, Inspector. I was calling on you this evening, as a matter of fact. Not that I've got anything much for you. I'm completely at sea about it. A bad business."

"Well," Bull said, "give me a short statement of your connection with the Isoms."

Mr. Shrubsole nodded happily. Mr. Pinkerton caught the quickly appraising glance he gave Bull as he went over to the safe. He opened it with elaborate twisting and retwisting of the shining dial. He took out a japanned strong box, unlocked it, took out a bunch of keys. Selecting one with care, he crossed the room to the green filing cabinet, unlocked it and took out a folder.

He caught Mr. Pinkerton's eye and chuckled.

"My information is strictly confidential," he remarked.

Inspector Bull waited in stolid silence. It had often seemed to Mr. Pinkerton that his ponderous silences frequently made things extremely awkward. It did so now, reducing Mr. Shrubsole's ritual of protecting his clients' interests to something peculiarly silly. Mr. Shrubsole seemed aware of it.

"Here we are, then," he said. His manner was a trifle short.

He turned over the papers in the file.

"Marie Louise Isom communicated with us by telephone, June 23rd last. Operative Y put on the case, tailing Q. S. and M. J.—that would be Quentin Sellers and Marguerite Jessop, of course. Without result. We so reported to Mrs. Isom on July 23rd. Told to continue. We did continue, without result, till August 11th. August 11th, client deceased."

He closed the folder.

"And there you have it, Inspector. Suspicions are figments of a disordered imagination, I'm sorry to say, among many of our clients. So you see, Inspector. . . ."

He moved his chair back. "I'm sorry you've had this trip for nothing."

He got up. Mr. Pinkerton got up too. Inspector Bull sat motionless in the leather chair. Mr. Shrubsole's look of bewilderment was so unconvincing that Mr. Pinkerton, quite ashamed of himself, sat down hastily.

"I know that's what you've got in your files," Bull said dryly. "I didn't come here from Brighton to hear that. I want what's in your head. Colonel Isom and the nurse, for instance. What did you dig up? And I'm in a hurry."

Mr. Shrubsole sat down, looking at Bull a little sullenly.

He then smiled with great good humour and affability.

"The Colonel has been talking?"

"The Colonel has been talking," Bull said patiently. "And everybody else in Brighton."

"I see. Well . . . you understand I must protect our own interests here, Inspector. Our policy is a . . . a certain blindness where our clients' affairs are concerned."

He indicated the poster over the mantel. Bull did not bother to look at it. He waited. Mr. Shrubsole looked steadily at him for a moment and shrugged.

"In June," he said, "we were approached by Mrs. Isom and directed to find out the relations between Jessop and Quentin Sellers. There weren't any . . . yet. It wasn't Sellers's fault as far as we could observe. We did, however, run on to several other items of interest. The Colonel was much interested in Nurse Jessop, for instance. They were good friends. Nothing criminal . . . yet. The butler, Arthur L. Noakes, and Jessop were apparently more than friendly."

Mr. Pinkerton moved forward an inch on his chair. There was no sign of interest on Bull's face, and he said nothing. Mr. Shrubsole went on:

"I made a mistake, which I can admit to you. I . . . misunderstood my client. I took it for granted that the situation there was as she had represented it. I knew Sellers had lived there for a long time, and would presumably be remembered in Mrs. Isom's will. I assumed that she really stated what she wanted to know—namely, whether Sellers was playing the game.

Of course, carrying on with his benefactress's attendant would not be playing the game. In other words, I assumed the old woman was jealous of the nurse's receiving attentions from Sellers. I gathered he was a sort of respectable dependent gigolo."

Mr. Shrubsole paused.

"That's where I made my mistake. I found it out quite recently . . . *after* I informed Colonel Isom that I knew he was interested in Nurse Jessop, and after I had accepted him as a client."

He looked at Bull steadily.

"Carefully avoiding anything in the line of blackmail, of course," Bull suggested.

Mr. Shrubsole chuckled. "Oh, most definitely, Inspector. I merely took Colonel Isom's interests in charge—at his own request, as he'll tell you—and before I had realized that of course it was that relationship that the old woman was after. She didn't want evidence against Sellers at all, or knowledge about what he was up to with the nurse. She wanted to know what the Colonel was up to with the nurse. By the time I'd realized that, you see, my hands were tied as far as she was concerned."

"I see," Bull said dryly. "Lucky you'd changed your client. You'd have been out of a job. How did you find it out?"

"Well, we've got to protect our sources, I'm afraid, Inspector."

"You got the tip from Marius Evill, I expect?"

Mr. Pinkerton moved forward another inch.

"Possibly. He seemed to know quite a lot about things down there. Anyway, we got it . . . too late. By that time, of course, I'd gone into Jessop's affairs, and I was able to give the Colonel information, for value received."

Mr. Pinkerton blinked.

"Information about her past life?" Bull asked. "Her . . . marital connection, for instance?"

Mr. Shrubsole nodded.

"When did you give it to him?"

"My solicitor took a confidential communication to him for me on Tuesday morning."

"The morning Mrs. Isom was murdered," Bull remarked.

"Unfortunately. Certainly there was no connection."

"Who is your solicitor?"

"Mr. Marius Evill, Inspector."

"This was a written communication?"

Mr. Shrubsole nodded.

"Did Mr. Evill know you were acting for one after another of the Isoms . . . as things turned up?" Inspector Bull asked.

Shrubsole looked sharply at him.

"I mentioned it, I believe, when I was tracking down some point or other about Sellers. Evill has been pretty closely associated with all of them for years."

Bull put his note-book in his pocket and got up.

"You've not mentioned the young lady at the Isoms'. Miss Farrell."

Shrubsole rose.

"No," he said. "As a matter of background solely, my man found out that she's been pulling the wool over everybody's eyes consistently. She's been clandestinely meeting an American chap named Read, Andrew Read, at various places almost every day. Chiefly in the Lanes during the day and on the Downs at night, slipping out for long walks. Mrs. Isom's companion was helping them in the daytime. They managed alone at night. We found out one or two things about Read. Nothing wrong about either of them, really. Quite nice young people. His father has money to burn, it seems. Young fellow got into a couple of scrapes in Paris. Nothing serious."

"You mentioned all that to Mrs. Isom?"

Shrubsole hesitated. "No," he said. "We weren't assigned to that situation."

He chuckled suddenly.

"The companion, Miss Arnold, caught our man one day and gave him a piece of her mind. No, we weren't paid for that. It just turned up . . . incidentally. We made no report on it."

Mr. Pinkerton, remembering his few moments in front of the Octopus tank in the Brighton Aquarium, on Monday morning, could nearly have chuckled too.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE Brighton Belle sped on velvet wheels through the soft August twilight. Inspector Bull pored over a sheaf of papers he had picked up in Scotland Yard, his brow set in deep furrows. Mr. Evan Pinkerton sat opposite him, looking out of the window, counting the rabbits, thinking. He was thinking about Andy Read and Linda Farrell and Amelia Arnold. It was a strange experience to meet a person like her, waspish and harsh one instant, the next as gentle and romantic as he himself. He wondered what she would do now, how she would live on the fifty pounds a year that Mrs. Isom had left her. The vague idea that perhaps there was something he could do came into his mind. Perhaps she and Linda could live in the huge empty house in Golders Green, for instance.

He glanced timidly at Bull. He was chewing one frayed end of his moustache. He had a pencil in his hand and a plan of the Brighton Pavilion. It was on two sheets, one showing the ground floor, the other the upper apartments. Mr. Pinkerton studied his set face with apprehensive interest, not daring to interrupt or question him. His heart beat a slow depressed tattoo, and when Bull finally folded the plans and put them in his pocket without a word of explanation, he felt it almost stop beating altogether. After all, then, Bull was not really taking him into his confidence.

He stared out of the window. Bull pressed the bell at his shoulder and ordered two glasses of ale.

"It's an interesting case," he said, when the attendant had brought them, and his glass was empty except for the wisp of white foam clinging to the side. "It's very neat, in a way. Carefully timed, carefully worked out.

You can see it was all done very . . . very intelligently. It's the most intelligent case we've had."

Mr. Pinkerton took a cautious sip of the tangy yellow ale, and flushed with pleasure at the way Bull had put it, and excitement at what he had put.

"Do you . . . do you know what it's all about?" he asked, almost holding his breath lest Inspector Bull should say yes.

"Some things are clearer than they were," Bull answered placidly. "What I've just said is one of 'em. It seems complicated, on the face of it. I expect it's very simple, when all's said and done. But it was daring, and clever, and . . ."

He groped for the right word.

"Thoughtful," he said at last. "Every advantage was taken of all sorts of things. For instance, nobody's got an alibi. Yet everybody's got a good reason for being where he was, or where he says he was. The only people who are questionable are your friends the young people. Why did Read go about looking like a thunder-cloud at the Pavilion, why did Miss Farrell bolt out of it by the garden window instead of going out by the door? Why, on the night Jessop is murdered, does she slip out through the mews to the cliff, and back again, and deny the whole business?"

Mr. Pinkerton choked on his ale.

"What makes you think she was out on the cliff that night?" he inquired, when he had got his breath.

Bull looked at him reproachfully but patiently.

"What was it Shrubsole said?—we've got to protect our sources."

Mr. Pinkerton remembered the moving shadow at the bottom of Andy Read's door in the Green Trout. He drew a quick breath. It was the first time he could remember thinking that the methods of the police were underhanded. He had known, of course, that they were watching Andy Read. In fact the last thing Bull had

said the night before, before he turned out the light, was that Andy had gone to bed. And now they knew everything Andy had told him about Linda.

"Oh, dear!" he thought.

"Then the motives," Inspector Bull said imperturbably. "In a case like this motive isn't enough. You'd be confused no end if you thought about that alone. A motive that might drive a person like Sellers to this, for instance, wouldn't necessarily mean a thing to your friend Read, say."

Mr. Pinkerton took heart at something he remembered suddenly.

"If Mr. Read's father is really very wealthy," he said, "then the money probably would mean nothing to him. So, as far as that goes . . ."

Inspector Bull nodded.

"We had reports on Read from the beginning," he said. "As you'd imagine. I knew all that. I've never thought it was Read for a moment. No, he's been pretty transparent. What I can't make out satisfactorily about him is why he's so sure Miss Farrell is mixed up in it. That's what's been worrying him. And apart from him, of course, five thousand pounds is a lot of money. It would mean a lot to any of the other people involved."

He picked up his glass and drained the final drops that had collected at the bottom.

"It . . . it seems odd to me," Mr Pinkerton ventured, "that you have detained Burkett and Noakes, and haven't detained Colonel Isom."

"I thought you were the chap that was shielding Colonel Isom," Bull said.

"Well, I've admitted that was a mistake," Mr. Pinkerton replied apologetically. "I don't really know why I did it. I . . . I knew Andy Read was out there. I suppose I must have lost my head."

Bull looked out of the window.

"It's not so simple as that," he said, after a while.

"You see, there's that bit of cloth on the end of the cord to be explained. It's yellow."

Mr. Pinkerton stared. "He wore a yellow waistcoat. I saw it myself, at the Pavilion."

"He changed into a dark waistcoat after his wife's death," Bull said patiently. "He'd got on a dark waistcoat when we talked to him, before you found Jessop's body, and after, when we saw him again."

"Oh," Mr. Pinkerton said.

"So you'd have to explain that," Bull said thoughtfully.

Mr. Pinkerton studied the matter.

"He still seems to me to be a very suspicious character," he said finally. "It seems to me that when you think about it, he'd realize, when he knew his wife's detectives were shadowing Sellers, that they were really after him, as they really were. Especially if they had been trying to get him off to a sanatorium and all that. And he knew about the money, and no doubt he knew she'd taken it with her to the Pavilion. Suppose he realized it was his last chance, and all that sort of thing? That's why he killed his wife. And if you think it's odd that Linda Farrell went out by the garden window, I think it's odd that Colonel Isom went out by the kitchen door telling me his name was Mr. Harris if anybody asked me."

"Well, he's an odd man, Miss Farrell is a normal young lady," Bull said. "However, what he did then in the kitchen isn't odd at all. He thought, of course, that you were a detective his wife had hired to spy on him. That's so natural that you'd already been taken for one, the day before, by Miss Arnold. I fancy the fact is that Operative Y of Messrs. Fox and Leach looks like you."

Mr. Pinkerton thought about it.

"Furthermore," Bull said. "What point would there be in his murdering his wife when he'd just learned that

Marguerite Jessop was married to Noakes, as Shrubsole just told us he had learned?"

"Maybe he'd not learned it," Mr. Pinkerton said stubbornly. "You don't know that Evill told him. Maybe he hadn't. Maybe if he had done, Colonel Isom wouldn't have killed his wife."

Inspector Bull scowled.

"To hear you talk, Pinkerton," he said placidly, "a person would think convictions and hangings were a sort of prize given out to the chap with the best motive for wanting to be rid of a person. I declare you never think of evidence."

Mr. Pinkerton flushed. There was something in it, he knew.

"Nevertheless," he said pertinaciously, "it does usually turn out that the person who murders somebody had a strong reason for doing it. And finding that motive *I* always thought was one of the first things the police do."

"So it is," Inspector Bull conceded. "Means and opportunity you've got to consider as well. In this case there are plenty of motives. It's *the* motive that's to be found. Five thousand pounds is motive enough for a policeman, without bringing in sanatoriums, jealousy, butlers' wives and all the rest."

He ordered a second glass of ale.

"It's in my mind," he said, "that that money, say what you will, is the motive in this case for the murder of Mrs. Isom *and* the murder of Nurse Jessop. I . . . well, I'd better not tell you that. The money was the motive to my way of thinking. That's what apparently complicates it so. Who that was on the spot wants money?—At the Pavilion when Mrs. Isom was killed? The whole boiling. The Colonel, Sellers, Linda Farrell, Amelia Arnold, Evill, Noakes, Jessop, and Burkett and his woman."

Mr. Pinkerton blinked. It was true, of course. "But . . . Steve and Polly are out of it, surely?" he asked.

"Why are they?"

"Why, they were in custody when Nurse Jessop was killed."

"There could have been two murderers. It's the motive that's constant in a case of this kind."

Mr. Pinkerton saw that, though he doubted if Inspector Bull thought so, really. A solution popped into his head.

"What," he demanded excitedly, "if Nurse Jessop killed Mrs. Isom, and took the money? She did come back to the Music Room, as I figured out she could, after Steve and Polly had left and before Miss Arnold had come, and stabbed her. She was actually in the vegetable kitchen when I heard her, of course; I suppose she could have got the scullery knife there."

Then Mr. Pinkerton thought of something else.

"Why didn't Mrs. Isom, with that terrible great harsh voice of hers, cry out when she was killed?"

There was a slight twinkle in Bull's eyes. "Why?" he said.

"Because," Mr. Pinkerton went on, "she'd had the stroke that Mr. Thurston thought probable; she was unconscious when the blow was struck."

"Why kill her, then, if the point was to get the money?"

Mr. Pinkerton, somewhat taken aback, came to a halt.

Inspector Bull, however, nodded approvingly at the same time that he said it.

"I think you're on the right track there, Pinkerton. If you could answer that last question of mine, you'd know what it's all about."

Mr. Pinkerton took that to be a fanciful way of speaking, which was a mistake.

"Well," he went on, "Nurse Jessop then took the money, after she'd killed the old lady. She knew about the money through Evill, or so he says. Somebody, however, knew about it too, and knew she'd got it; and

whoever it was waited, then, till they were able, somehow, to get her out there to where . . .”

Mr. Pinkerton blushed at the thought of what he had been about to say.

“Got her out there to the cliff, I mean, and killed her . . . with the same motive, of course, just as you said. To get the five thousand pounds.”

Then, warming to his task, he thought of something else.

“You said her room had been gone through between the different times you searched it. That’s no doubt what happened, then, exactly.”

Bull smiled faintly.

“I thought you’d been sure it was Colonel Isom did both jobs.”

The train had gone through the long tunnel under the Downs, the myriad red roofs and yellow chimney-pots of Brighton were out to the left. Mr. Pinkerton got up and reached for his brown bowler.

“It’s puzzling,” he said simply.

Arthur L. Noakes sat in the centre of the Chief Constable’s high-ceilinged room in the Town Hall. He wore a neatly pressed grey lounge suit, and he looked older—a great deal older than Mr. Pinkerton had remembered him. His dark eyes moved about the room with an expression at once beaten and defiant, but with none of the saturnine cynicism that Mr. Pinkerton had seen when he had first come into contact with him, on Tuesday morning, on the Parade, when Mrs. Marie Louise Isom had been helped out of the grey Rolls into the bath-chair some thirty minutes before her violent death. He looked unfinished too. It was because he was out of his usual setting, Mr. Pinkerton decided, not having a silver salver or door knob in his hand.

“He must have been frightfully keen on her,” he thought, feeling a sudden sharp twinge of sympathy for

the man whom Bull and Farquarson were questioning about his dead wife.

"She only married me because she was ill and hadn't got anything saved to fall back on. After she got strong again and took another post I saw the way it was. I tried to forget it. I didn't bother her often. Only when I saw her headed for trouble."

"What sort of trouble, for instance?"

Emotion so tangible that it might have been an extra mask made of a sort of plastic pain distorted the man's dark face for an instant. He opened and closed his hands mechanically.

"It must have been the excitement leading her on," he said, after a bit. "I thought she'd stop all that. It was in her blood. I didn't care about the morality of it. It was because I knew she'd crack up some time. That's why I tried to get a post in the same house or town if she was to be there long."

Sitting on his chair by the Chief Constable's door, Mr. Pinkerton listened. He was greatly surprised. This was by no means the saturnine winking butler, suave and sinister, that he had steadily thought of Noakes as being.

"I shut my eyes to the way she carried on with the gentlemen. If I did object, she said I was welcome to divorce her, she had no further need of me. I was only a servant. She could do better for herself another time."

His face twisted into something of the smile that Mr. Pinkerton remembered.

"I knew she could have done."

"You mean . . . Colonel Isom?" Bull asked.

He shrugged.

"I expect that's why I didn't give up and let her go. I wanted her myself."

He looked directly at Bull.

"She didn't kill Mrs. Isom, if that's what you mean. I thought she'd taken the money. I even thought she

might have killed her. I asked her about it. She said, which was perfectly true, there'd been many a time she could have got rid of the old lady easily if she'd had a mind to, and I had no need to accuse her of the murder. I asked her about the money. She said she'd not got the money, but she'd get it. She knew who had got it. She wouldn't say who it was."

"She said she did know?" Bull asked. "When did she say that?"

"After tea. After you were at the house at tea. It was the first chance I'd got, after I'd heard Evill telling her he felt it was his duty to tell you he'd told her what was in the envelope."

"You knew what was in it?"

Noakes shook his head. "No idea."

"What did she say to Mr. Evill when he told her that?"

"She was pert. It was her way with gentlemen. She said she'd be forced to tell you Mrs. Isom had said his management of her affairs was little better than incompetent thievery. She was very quick with her tongue. She didn't mean half what she said."

"Did you tell her you'd overheard that conversation when you accused her of taking the money?"

"No. She was always accusing me of prying into her affairs and eavesdropping when actually I was not. It's easy to confuse a well-trained servant with other inanimate objects."

He smiled quietly.

"Sometimes the gentlemen were not as discreet as they might have been . . . not knowing she was anything to me."

Mr. Pinkerton shook his head, thinking how oddly painful life in the Isom household must have been all around.

"You see, Inspector," Noakes continued abruptly, "I cared a great deal for her. I would have been a blind fool not to have seen that I was in her way. She

was cut out for a gay life that I couldn't give her; she didn't want to be interfered with. But she wasn't a murderess. If I'd not been crocked up in the war, and had to get a post as a house servant, it might have been different."

He shrugged. "Maybe I wouldn't have met her then. But she didn't kill Mrs. Isom."

It seemed strange to Mr. Pinkerton that he continually came back to Mrs. Isom's murder, never once to that of the woman he had married.

"Maybe," Bull said. "You drove the car to the Pavilion that morning?"

"To the Pavilion Parade. Not to the entrance."

"Did you understand why you were going there?"

"I understood my wife had reasons for wanting Mrs. Isom in the Pavilion that morning. She said she'd make it right if Mrs. Isom was angry. She could handle her. She didn't say what the reasons were."

"You knew, however?" Bull asked.

"I supposed it was so Madam would see Miss Farrell was meeting the American against Madam's wishes."

"Was that your wife's idea?"

"Mr. Sellers's also."

The Chief Constable spoke. "He wanted to marry Miss Farrell himself?"

Noakes looked round at him. "No, sir," he said politely. "I don't think Mr. Sellers had any wish to marry Miss Farrell. It had nothing to do with her, except indirectly. Neither of them cared what Miss Farrell did. It was Miss Arnold that Sellers particularly was aiming at. Miss Farrell and the American were incidental."

Mr. Pinkerton stirred uneasily. He saw Bull's eyes resting on him for a moment.

"Miss Arnold?" Farquarson asked.

"Yes, sir. Sellers wanted to show Madam that Miss Arnold was setting up against her wishes. I believe he thought she stood between him and a much greater

influence over both Mrs. and Colonel Isom. Miss Arnold kept them both from throwing money away. She kept pointing out that Colonel Isom only drank when Mr. Sellers and . . . other people supplied him with liquor. He made a stout effort to keep away from it otherwise. So Sellers would have liked her out of his way. That's what he was up to."

Bull pencilled a note on the paper in front of him in a peculiarly matter-of-fact way, it seemed to Mr. Pinkerton. He said, without looking up, "That was what your wife was up to also?"

The expression on the sallow face did not change. "That's right, Inspector."

"She had no interest in Mr. Sellers, then?"

"None at all," Noakes said coolly. "He was interested—up to a point—in anybody who'd look at him."

Bull nodded. "I expected that was it," he said. "Tell me again, exactly, what your wife said when you asked her if she'd taken the money from Mrs. Isom?"

The butler thought a moment.

"I don't remember her exact words. She said she would get it, she knew who had it. She was angry. I gathered she felt she'd been badly used by somebody."

"You're quite sure she didn't mention any name?"

"She mentioned no name at all, Inspector."

"And no place?"

"No place."

"Did she say anything about a quarrel with Mrs. Isom at the Pavilion?"

Noakes hesitated again. "Yes. I don't know what it was. Probably one of their scenes. Mrs. Isom enjoyed them. She bullied every one else, Marguerite bullied her. I don't know why she stood it, except that she really wanted someone to master her perhaps. Marguerite was a very hard woman."

Mr. Pinkerton stared open-mouthed. Inspector Bull showed no surprise. "Where were you the night your wife fell off the cliff?"

“In the house the whole time. Up and down stairs, answering bells, looking after things. I have no time off at night, till eleven. I get up again shortly before two to get the Colonel to bed. I have to be up again with his tea at six. It’s a habit of his. Mrs. Isom tried hard to break him of it, but she gave it up. If there are guests he does the same thing. He gets up at six each morning, so I expect he’s tired by night.”

His dark protruding eyes lighted for an instant.

“Colonel Isom is a very odd man, sir. He wears open collars and shorts for his morning walk. He puts strawberry jam in his tea, never knocks the ashes out of his pipes, never cleans them, because it ruins the taste. Wears one eyeglass when he needs two, never touches salt. There’s a long list of such things. When I first came I thought he was a bit off, the way he’d burst out laughing every few minutes. He told me one day that it’s the best exercise for the diaphragm and prevents indigestion. That and standing up, and not reading, for at least one hour after meals.”

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE Chief Constable shook his head and lighted his pipe. Bull's expression of stolid disinterest had not changed.

"Did you hear anyone leave the house that evening?"

"Mr. Sellers. I didn't know my wife was out. Her door was locked when I went up."

"You omitted to tell us that before," Bull remarked.

"I wanted to save her everything I could. She often locked her door."

"What about the tradesmen's entrance? Did you hear anybody go out there?"

"Only Miss Farrell."

"Was that customary?"

"It was none of my business, Inspector. I never blamed her for slipping out. They were all against her, all except Miss Arnold, and she hadn't any say in what went on."

"When did she go out?"

"About ten, I expect. She came in while I was lying down. Before you came back the second time."

Mr. Pinkerton stared, open-mouthed, for the fraction of an instant, and collected himself hastily. He looked covertly at Bull's heavy face. There was no sign on it that a most singular statement had been made.

"Oh, dear!" Mr. Pinkerton thought. "Can't he see *anything*?"

"That was before the telephone rang?" Bull asked.

"The telephone, Inspector?"

"Yes. It rang around 12.30."

"I wouldn't have heard that. The telephone is in Mrs. Isom's room on the first floor between the library and the drawing-room. It wouldn't be heard in my

room. I didn't leave it until Mr. Read rang the doorbell considerably later than that."

Bull nodded his heavily thatched auburn head. Mr. Pinkerton saw, with a sudden sinking of the heart, that he was not even chewing his moustache, which was the only sign that he was interested, or even thinking. Bull shifted his papers and continued to gaze placidly at the butler.

"One other point, Mr. Noakes. I understand from Constable Davidson and a car park attendant named O'Leary that you left the car on Tuesday morning, in the Old Steine, and were there talking with them for approximately twenty-five minutes."

Noakes nodded.

"You left them, however, for about ten minutes, asking Davidson to keep an eye on your car till you got back. Is that right?"

"Quite right," Noakes said calmly. "I was to meet Mrs. Isom at the India Gate at 12.15."

"You're accounted for, then, except for that ten minutes. Where were you then?"

"I went through Steine Lane into East Street on a confidential errand for Mrs. Isom."

"What was it?"

"To get her an ounce of snuff. She used it privately. It's still in the glove compartment of the car. The shop assistant can tell you I was there. His name's Barker."

Mr. Pinkerton quivered with impatience. He was more worried than he had ever been in his life, and never, in his long experience with Inspector Bull, had he seen him, deliberate and stolid as he was by nature, a tenth so deliberate and stolid as he was being now.

Bull got up and moved ponderously to the end of the room and back.

"That's all now, Mr. Noakes. You'll stop on in Brighton for the time."

Mr. Pinkerton watched Noakes leave the room,

escorted out by a uniformed constable. Bull sat down, took out his pipe and his rolled oilskin pouch and began to fill the charred bowl with unbearable deliberation.

"Well," the Chief Constable said brusquely, "that doesn't appear to get us much forarder, I'm afraid."

Mr. Pinkerton looked at him gratefully. It was the first time they had seen eye to eye on any point. There was, however, one point of the greatest importance, or that could be of the greatest importance if Noakes was speaking the truth.

"Well," Bull said, "we *know* Linda Farrell did not come back on Tuesday night, by the tradesmen's entrance, at the time Noakes says. That's a very important point."

He looked at the Chief Constable. There was a slight twinkle in his eyes, and a look on his face that would not have been noticeable, probably, to any but Mr. Pinkerton. Seeing it, the little man could feel the fine beads of perspiration standing out on his forehead. He stared at Bull from his seat by the door. Again, for some reason that he could not understand, a sense of growing consternation, of disaster even, came over him.

"Consequently," Inspector Bull went on, "it was some other person who came back there then, after Noakes had gone up to his room. We had presumed it was, before."

"You are still presuming it," the Chief Constable said. "Your evidence is that it was Miss Farrell. The butler's evidence."

Bull shook his head soberly. "Miss Farrell did not come in till Miss Arnold went down to give her a signal, when we were in the library. No, I take it it means simply that someone not Linda Farrell or Sellers returned to the house that way, that night, after Jessop was killed, and they don't care to admit it."

He struck a vesta and puffed slowly and thoughtfully at his pipe. Then he looked at Mr. Pinkerton.

"The murder of Marguerite Jessop was a cold-blooded, premeditated act," he said. "It was deliberately, definitely planned and arranged and carried out. But it was not as clever as the murder of Mrs. Isom in the Pavilion. That also was cold-blooded and premeditated. It had certain aspects of chance. It was bound to have, with all those people wandering about through all those rooms."

Mr. Pinkerton took out his purple handkerchief and mopped his forehead. It was not so much what the Inspector had yet said, as his whole manner of . . . of looking backward, so to speak, that sent a cold thrill up and down his spine. He moved forward a bit in his chair, never taking his eyes off Bull's face.

He noticed also that his friend was being richly articulate almost to the point of lyricism, which was very unusual for him.

"Professionally considered," Inspector Bull went on, "it . . . I would say that while it was not the best planned, it was the most intelligently and skilfully covered crime I can remember. It reached heights of . . . of very intelligent thinking indeed. As I see it, when the crime had been committed—I mean the murder of Mrs. Isom—a very shocking thing happened, as you might call it from the murderer's point of view. It was something that was the purest accident and ought never to have happened at all; and it was so unexpected that it made it necessary to remake a whole elaborate and very clever alibi. That business of remaking the alibi was done perfectly, and at a few minutes' notice. Only one mistake was made. The murderer started on a wrong track, recovered almost instantly, and never looked back; but one false clue had been left. It was so slight that nobody has mentioned it up to the present time."

Inspector Bull was silent for a moment, Farquarson and Mr. Pinkerton staring at him.

"There's no question, of course, but that the hand

that drove the knife into Mrs. Isom's throat is the hand that pushed Jessop off the cliff."

Mr. Pinkerton's thin blood stream pounded violently at his ears. He opened his mouth, but for an instant no words would come to it. Then he managed to speak.

"You . . . you *know* who it was that . . . ?"

Inspector Bull nodded with great placidity. "It's been evident for some time. I thought from the very beginning that a certain person was pointed to. Noakes said two things that helped. We . . . we need two points yet, however."

He turned to the Chief Constable. Mr. Pinkerton, sitting there in his chair by the door, straightened his tie and adjusted his spectacles mechanically, mopping his forehead again. His mind for an instant quite refused to work. Then he began stubbornly to construct and reconstruct his previously formed notions about the murders that had taken place on Tuesday.

Was it necessary, he wondered, for him to give up Noakes as the murderer, at least of Marguerite Jessop? What if, for instance, it should turn out that Bull was wrong, about part of it, anyway, and it was not the same hand at all that had killed the two? He had an alibi, no doubt, if Bull accepted it, for the murder of his employer at 11.30 or thereabouts on Tuesday morning. If he had parked Mrs. Isom's dove-grey Rolls in the Old Steine, in front of the Y.M.C.A. (long the residence, Mr. Pinkerton thought irrelevantly, of Mrs. Fitzherbert, commoner wife of George the Fourth), and had been there talking to a police constable while Mrs. Isom was being killed, then even Mr. Pinkerton was forced to conclude that he could not have done the thing himself.

An idea struck him. Noakes had gone, by his own statement, to buy an ounce of snuff for Mrs. Isom, at a shop in East Street. He had been gone for ten minutes. Mr. Pinkerton wondered. Was it possible that the white-faced black-eyed man could have slipped into

the Pavilion in so short a time, through the windows on the terrace, for instance? It was barely conceivable, of course. Furthermore, Bull would have thought of that, and checked it, long before. That was one of the things he could always be counted on to have done.

However, there was more to it than that. Noakes's alibi, that he was in the Isom house all that Tuesday evening, depended, so far as Mr. Pinkerton knew, solely on his own word. If someone else—not Linda Farrell, as he had seen instantly as well as Bull—could have slipped out and back, then so could Noakes have done. Or could he? Mr. Pinkerton, oblivious to the little room and the two men talking in low tones at the desk, pondered desperately. Was it possible, with Colonel Isom there, and all the others, for Noakes . . . ? He shook his head helplessly. It was too puzzling.

If Nurse Jessop *had* killed Mrs. Isom, and got the five thousand pounds, and if all the rest of what Noakes had said was true, that she was through with him and out to better herself . . . well, it would not be the first time that a forsaken husband had . . .

The jangling telephone on the Chief Constable's desk interrupted his sinister meditation. Farquarson barked into it. Mr. Pinkerton listened impatiently while he said, "Good. Good. Good," nodding his head. At last, after a long time, he put the receiver down.

"Inspector Johnson," he said to Bull.

"Found them?"

Farquarson nodded. He smiled grimly.

"They're both from Lewes. He's a clerk at the Provincial Midlands Bank, married, three children. She's a typist, in another office, supposed to be spending the night with her cousin in Pevensey. That's why they ran off, and why they didn't come forward later. Johnson's bringing the man. Name of Leeds. He promised to be discreet about it."

Mr. Pinkerton blinked from one to the other.

"Johnson says they didn't seem to have seen anybody

but a man and a girl on the cliff earlier, and the man they saw at the top of the stairs."

He looked over at Mr. Pinkerton.

"I didn't expect they would have done," Bull said. "That will be Miss Farrell and Read, and Pinkerton, of course."

Mr. Pinkerton understood. They had got the two people who had first seen Nurse Jessop's body on the sea wall.

He shifted uneasily in his chair. One thing about all this was becoming steadily more unpleasant, even humiliating, to him. It was the first case he had ever been on, along with Inspector Bull, where he had known little or nothing of the actual course of detection that the police were following. Not that Bull had ever been what one might call communicative, but Mr. Pinkerton had always before been able to make out the main broad lines that his investigation was taking. Not so here.

He took a deep breath. It was his own fault, he knew. The police, furthermore, had to be objective in matters of the sort. They couldn't say Linda Farrell was a pretty girl, Andy Read a fine lad, therefore they weren't guilty of murder; Noakes was a saturnine secretive person with white skin, black side whiskers and bulging bold eyes, therefore he was guilty of murder. The police could not do that, and it was just about what he had done.

He tried desperately to think what the second important thing was that Noakes had said.

An idea came to him that caused his small grey ego, crushed to earth, to rise again. He had got information, for one thing, that to the best of his knowledge even Inspector Bull had not got. He knew much more about the inside of the house in Sussex Square than Bull did, for instance. Mr. Pinkerton stirred suddenly. Bull had said, and there could be no doubt of it, that whether there was one murderer or two the money was certainly

a large part of the motive of both murders . . . probably the entire motive for the killing of Nurse Jessop. Everything about her became, therefore, of the utmost importance. Such, for instance, as the information Noakes had just given them—"She knew where the money was; she would get it." But, Mr. Pinkerton thought excitedly, there was one person to whom Nurse Jessop had talked a great deal—against his will to be sure—about whom no one had so far thought: namely, himself.

He racked his brain to think if she had said anything to him, that evening at supper on the terrace of Black Rock Pool, that could hint at anything, point to anything.

The telephone jangled again. Mr. Pinkerton, his mind racing along like mad, reconstructing and remembering as best he could, watched and listened mechanically.

The Chief Constable handed the receiver to Bull. "It's the Yard."

Mr. Pinkerton swallowed excitedly and forgot all about Nurse Jessop. The words roused deep inside him much the same emotion that the spontaneous shout "They're off!" rouses in racing people as the horses burst into the start.

He listened to Inspector Bull bellowing, "Are you there?" as he always did, as if the instrument was a devil that had got to be subdued before it became tractable. His heart beat rapidly.

"Yes," Bull said. "Right. Right. Then have *all* post offices notified. That's right. Search for a parcel sent Poste Restante from Brighton about noon, or later, on Tuesday. Right."

He put down the receiver. Mr. Pinkerton looked at him open-mouthed, twisting nervously in his seat, groping mentally for something just out of his reach. He sat bolt upright then as two ideas struck him at virtually the same time, and sat motionless for a long

time, staring mechanically at the wall, flushing a little to think how blind he had been.

It was perfectly clear to him now just what Bull thought.

He shivered suddenly with the keenest excitement. It was perfectly clear to him also that Bull was wrong, in part at least, and for a very good reason. His thinking was right; he simply did not know. Mr. Pinkerton blinked rapidly. It was not Noakes, of course. There was only one person, really, when you came to think about it, of those who could possibly have killed Marie Louise Isom, who knew that she had the five thousand pounds with her in the first place, and had the means of getting it out of the Brighton Pavilion unsuspected in the second place.

Mr. Pinkerton felt a little shudder of horror pass over him as he realized, just then, sitting on the edge of the chair by the door in the Chief Constable's room, that now, when everything that he knew came burningly clear into his mind, the hand of justice pointed directly, inexorably, to just one person. But it was not that, actually, that made his hand shake as he wiped his forehead free again of the perspiration standing out in great drops. It was the idea that in part at least Inspector Bull was wrong. He knew, of course, who it was who had stabbed Mrs. Isom in the Music Room of the Pavilion and shoved the yellow-haired nurse off King's Cliff to her death on the concrete walk by the sea wall seventy-five feet below. But he had not heard Nurse Jessop make one remark that now burned in Mr. Pinkerton's brain. He did not know what the murderer had done with the money.

Mr. Pinkerton brought himself back to the present scene with a jerk as an idea popped into his mind. It was now vitally necessary, and for a particular reason, to do something about Linda Farrell and Andy Read. Mr. Pinkerton realized suddenly that for the only time in what might be called his criminal career he did not

really care very much about the murderer. The course of justice, faithful, painstaking and undeviating, would take its way, perfectly relentless and unerring in the long run, in Inspector Bull's deliberate and laborious hands. There was no use worrying about that. The *Affaire Farrell* was a different and, to Mr. Pinkerton's romantic mind, far more important matter. Something had got to be done about that, and quickly.

He stole a glance at the two men at the desk. They were speaking in low tones, quite oblivious of him. Mr. Pinkerton hesitated only an instant, and then, getting up very quietly, he tiptoed as silently as he could to the door, and closed it gently behind him.

CHAPTER XXXV

OUTSIDE in the wide corridor he hurried along, went through the big door on to the heavy brown stone-pillared portico, and stopped short. It occurred to him a little dampeningly that he was doing exactly what he had solemnly vowed several times already that day he would not do again. However, he was not exactly double-crossing Inspector Bull, if he was again mixing up in things that were really no concern of his. He was merely—if things worked out—getting in ahead of him, and of New Scotland Yard and the Brighton Constabulary; beating them to the kill, as it were, having his own case neatly settled and proved before the ponderous, slow and deliberate force they represented had even got properly into final motion. He did feel a bit guilty nevertheless. After all, Inspector Bull had . . .

Then he realized, or liked afterward to think he had realized, that this wavering conscience of his that had kept him standing for some minutes on the portico of the Brighton Town Hall was simply one of the many guises of Fate . . . or at least one more step in the extraordinary set of circumstances that had dogged his footsteps from the moment he had set foot in Victoria Station at five o'clock on Sunday afternoon. For he saw then, walking hurriedly along Market Street toward Brighton Place, the one and only person who could settle for him the two points that had got to be settled before he could draw the net of damning evidence close, and enmesh the murderer of Marie Louise Isom and Marguerite Jessop.

Mr. Pinkerton realized also that his pleasure in seeing Amelia Arnold was definitely part and parcel of the

warm feeling he had toward the golden-haired grey-eyed girl and the impulsive young man who was in love with her.

He straightened his tie and adjusted his brown bowler, and scurried up the hill of Bartholomews and into Market Street just in time to see Miss Arnold enter Brighton Place, keeping to the left.

Mr. Pinkerton's knowledge of Brighton's topography was sufficient to enable him to realize that she was heading toward the Lanes, that tiny triangular pocket of short narrow streets of dark little shops tucked away between Prince Albert Street, Brighton Place and North Street in the very heart of pre-Regency Brighton. He scurried along through Market Street into the oddly shaped square known as Brighton Place. The clock over Hannington's stood at 5.53, he noticed as he dived in between the two littered second-hand shops with windows piled full of jugs, basins and odd bits of broken china, into Meeting House Lane.

It also was full of tiny antique shops, like the other alleys of the Lanes; crowded with every conceivable object of art, old iron firebacks, Staffordshire dogs, silver spoons, porcelain rum tubs. A sort of seaside Caledonia Market, Mr. Pinkerton thought as he went hastily along. It was an odd and interesting section of Brighton. Except for a couple of greengrocers and a humble dwelling or two, all the shops in the lanes sold antiques, it seemed: old jewellery, silver, furniture, pictures, china, glass.

It seemed odd to Mr. Pinkerton, scurrying rapidly along, that Miss Arnold should be interested at this particular time in buying antiques. It appeared, however, to be the case. He could see her near the top of the lane looking in at a narrow dingy window. Then he recalled suddenly that it was in the Lanes that Linda Farrell and Andy Read had had their first rendezvous, and that Amelia Arnold had arranged it for them. His heart beat more quickly. Linda was certainly not with

her now, and he could not see Andy Read anywhere. Nevertheless . . .

She rounded the angle of the window into the doorway and disappeared from sight. Mr. Pinkerton, quite close by that time, heard a bell strike eventually, and a door close. He hurried along the short distance left and went in himself, not even stopping to think, as he normally would have done, that this was probably the first door except his own (and not always that) that he had ever entered without stopping a little space, timidly, before he put his hand on the knob.

Miss Arnold was standing in the middle of the littered shop looking at a pile of dust-covered odds and ends in a corner by the counter. She turned round at the opening of the door.

"Oh, Mr. Pinkerton!" she exclaimed cordially, brushing the dust off her glove. Mr. Pinkerton noticed with pleasure that her rather fine eyes lighted at the sight of him. She held out her hand.

"I was hoping I'd see you some time," she said. He thought that her face—it was a finely chiselled, sensitive face, now that he saw it lighted up with new animation—coloured just a little. "Nobody would believe that I've actually been hunting you . . . up and down the Sea Front. I didn't realize it myself, not really, until I walked past your hotel for the second time."

Mr. Pinkerton's face coloured too. He blinked, speechless with pleasure. Amelia Arnold still wore her raincoat, with a band of mourning round the sleeve. Under it she wore a black frock that made her face seem whiter, and quite stylish, Mr. Pinkerton thought, under the close-brimmed black hat.

"She's not beautiful," he found himself thinking, with outrageous irrelevance, standing there in the crowded musty atmosphere of thousands of discarded dust-covered objects from hundreds of forgotten houses, some with a faded aura of the past, some still lovely,

most—to his mind—pretty awful. They were alone in the shop. He had heard a chair pushed back and slow footsteps upstairs, but so far the dealer had not appeared.

“I wanted to tell you what your friend Inspector Bull did.”

Mr. Pinkerton’s heart stirred uneasily. He no longer had the complete confidence in Inspector Bull that he had once had.

“What did he do?” he asked.

“He sent Quentin Sellers to Lewes gaol,” Miss Arnold said. She smiled dryly. Mr. Pinkerton caught his breath sharply and giggled. That was really, and in a very fine way, a fig for Quentin Sellers.

“How . . . what for?” he asked.

“Some sort of identification parade. It seems there was a couple on the cliff on Tuesday night, and they saw a man. I didn’t get all of it. Inspector Johnson came over after lunch. He’d been out where the caravans park on the Downs. A man there took the number of the caravan next to him because the people seemed to be acting oddly that night—dashing about, the woman crying and what not. He reported it when he saw the police out there and heard what happened.”

Mr. Pinkerton nodded with great satisfaction. It was a bit puzzling, however. Odd, he thought, that they had not mentioned it to him. He saw instantly then that it was not odd at all. It was plainly a red herring drawn across the trail, as well, no doubt, as Inspector Bull’s little way of seeing that no awkward elopement took place that night. He wondered if Bull had realized that it was a red herring at the time he had done it, just after lunch. In any case, he thought, it was one, whether Bull had known it or not.

“I hope he keeps him there a month,” Amelia Arnold said, with a quick wry smile. “Or until Linda comes to her senses, at any rate.”

“Is . . . is she still determined to marry him?”

"I'm afraid so. Unless . . ."

She shook her head.

The proprietor of the shop appeared on the landing of the dark crooked stairs at the rear, a wizened tiny man with sparse longish white hair.

Amelia Arnold lowered her voice. "I suppose it's the old business of the wish being father to the thought. I'm afraid I'm a very wicked unprincipled old woman, Mr. Pinkerton, but . . . How d'ye do, Mr. Honeycutt."

"How d'ye do, ma'am," the little man said. He made his way slowly through the piled dusty masses of old china, old furniture, old iron, old stuffs and old oddments. He wore a soiled white neckcloth drawn through a large gold ring, and he was even smaller than Mr. Pinkerton.

"It's a pity about my lady, ma'am," he said. He had a clear piping little voice and a broad west country accent. "Who should have done it is more than I can tell. I expect the Colonel will be wanting to sell back all the bits she bought here and there."

"He'd like a bit of ready cash," Miss Arnold said dryly. "He thought——"

Mr. Honeycutt shook his head quickly.

"There's not much of a market for the sort of thing she bought," he piped. He seemed remarkably shrewd, for so tiny and apparently guileless an old gentleman. Mr. Pinkerton remembered another antiquary he had known, the frail, white-haired Adam Benn of Fulham Road. That was the first case he had ever been on with the Inspector. Then he remembered that his seventy-five thousand pounds had come to him, torn by death from Mrs. Pinkerton's tenacious clutch, from Adam Benn. That brought him back to Linda Farrell and Quentin Sellers.

"The Americans won't buy it, the French like it if it's pink," Mr. Honeycutt piped. "I'm pretty crowded here. Perhaps——"

"Now, now, Mr. Honeycutt," Miss Arnold said

briskly. She glanced at Mr. Pinkerton. "We'll go into it another time."

Mr. Pinkerton, edging toward the door, started to speak. She held up her hand and shook her head at him.

"Perhaps the Colonel can get in himself to-morrow."

She smiled at Mr. Pinkerton. When they were out in Meeting House Lane again she said, "I'm sorry about this. You've got into one of our little secrets. Oh, it doesn't make the slightest difference. You see, Colonel Isom wants a bit of cash pretty badly—as he always does—and he doesn't like to ask Evill for it . . . under the circumstances."

Mr. Pinkerton looked perplexed.

"You mean, you had to . . . ?"

Amelia Arnold laughed.

"My dear Mr. Pinkerton," she said. "It's the least of this sort of thing that I've been doing for years. Colonel Isom always wants money. I'm known to some of the best pawnbrokers in the realm. Mr. Honeycutt's an old robber, of course, but he's rather nice too. For years he's been selling to Mrs. Isom, and buying things back, *sub rosa* of course, from the Colonel when she'd forgotten all about them. I've helped at both transactions. The Colonel wants him to come out now, secretly, naturally, and look at all the ghastly stuff the house is littered with, and make him a sort of down payment on it. Then, when everything has blown over, finish the payment and cart it away. Mr. Honeycutt is in the awkward position of having to refuse to pay more than a shilling in the pound. Though Colonel Isom knows it's not worth that, most of it."

Mr. Pinkerton thought of the nude bronzes holding grapes and flambeaux, and what not, cluttering up the house in Kemptown.

"I . . . I'm awfully sorry," he said apologetically. "I'm afraid I interrupted your . . . your transactions."

"No. Mr. Honeycutt will come out. The Colonel

doesn't get cross easily, you know. Or maybe you don't. Every once in a while he decides to assert himself, though. Then things happen. I only wish he'd do it now, and keep Linda from making a mess of her life."

They had got to the top of Meeting House Lane, where the corner shop, adorned outside with every conceivable object, exudes a strong but not too unpleasant odour of incense. Miss Arnold hesitated.

"Well—I must go back now," she said.

Mr. Pinkerton fumbled at his purple string tie.

"Perhaps we could . . . go somewhere, and . . . talk?" he stammered. He could feel the colour surge into his face.

Miss Arnold brightened instantly, to his great surprise. They turned and walked through the crooked narrow lanes until they came to North Street. The tea-shop overlooking the Pavilion grounds in New Road was practically empty. With a strange warm sensation in the pit of his stomach the grey little man watched Amelia Arnold behind the battery of nickel-plated tea things, watched her pour the tea and the hot water without burning her fingers on the handle, which was something he had never been able to avoid.

He sat there in a pleased daze while she chose a large cream shoe from the dish of pastries for him, and a small seed cake for herself, and blinked in pleasure when she insisted that what he really wanted was a strawberry cream ice, and practically forced him to order it. Except that the woman at the cash desk had a faint but distinctly disagreeable resemblance to Mrs. Pinkerton, he could not remember when he had been quite so entirely pleased with life. There was no doubt of it; there was something to be said for women.

The idea drove out of his mind for a moment what he had really wanted to see Miss Arnold about, for he thought of Linda Farrell.

"Do you think that if Mr. Sellers received a . . . a sum of money . . . I mean, in a perfectly over-the-

counter sort of way . . . that he would be willing not to marry Linda?" he asked timidly.

Miss Arnold put down her teacup.

"I'm sure he would be delighted not to," she said, with a sort of dry solemnity, "under such circumstances. But I'm equally sure I don't know who's got the money to give him. Andrew Read might possibly have it. He gives me the impression that's he's much better off, probably, than . . . things would indicate. But after the way Linda's treated him. . . ."

She shook her head.

"I don't suppose he really can *know*."

"Know what?"

"That Linda had nothing to do with these dreadful things. Of course, he thinks she's connected with them. Perhaps it's too much to expect him to take it on faith—though I should have thought he loved her enough."

She smiled at Mr. Pinkerton across the table.

"It just goes to show how little I know about people. But I do know Linda. And when I went downstairs on Tuesday night, and saw him pacing up and down the kitchen like a caged tiger, absolutely beside himself with worry, wanting to go out and find her but not daring because he knew they were watching the house, I was sure he didn't mind. I mean, that even that wouldn't have made any difference."

Mr. Pinkerton, putting his fork into the cream shoe, blinked at her in great perplexity.

"You see," she went on quickly, "he'd seen an awful row between Quentin Sellers and Jessop and Linda. He told me he had. Linda was like a young devil. She said Nurse Jessop had got to leave at once, and Sellers had got to see to it that she did leave."

"But . . . but why?" Mr. Pinkerton demanded. "Why did she, if she cares for Andy Read?"

"That's what Andy wanted to know," Amelia Arnold said. "That's what threw him off, of course. Well, my dear Mr. Pinkerton, you must know there's no worse

prude in the world than a child of twenty. Perhaps prude isn't the word. Say stern moralist instead. Linda had learned somehow that Jessop was married. I expect Noakes told her. And Linda is a lot fonder of Colonel Isom than you'd believe. It's a queer loyal streak she's got. He was kind to her, in his way, in spite of what he often said."

She stirred her tea slowly.

"When you're twenty, Mr. Pinkerton, you can make sacrifices that are greater, and more completely selfless, than you're ever capable of again; and because older people forget, and because twenty is debonair, and brittle, and hard-surfaced, and proud, no one ever knows the tortures it's going through."

She looked fixedly into the cup. Mr. Pinkerton, watching her, wondered if she was remembering the young curate, and her own sacrifice long years ago.

"Linda, you see, has the odd and lovely notion that she's got to be a burnt-offering for all these people. Before Nurse Jessop was killed, the only way she saw to save Colonel Isom from being horribly hurt—or so she thought—was to get rid of Jessop. Get her out of the house where he couldn't see her and she couldn't keep him half-drunk all the time. Maybe she was wrong. But the only way she knew to get rid of Jessop was to agree to marry Sellers if he got rid of her. It shows how innocent she is."

She smiled ruefully.

"And then, when Jessop was killed, she felt she couldn't back out. Because then . . . well, if she doesn't marry him, he gets nothing by Mrs. Isom's will, and he's got to go to work or starve. I suppose he convinced her how frightfully devastating either fate would be. And he *had* agreed to help her—so now she's got to help him."

Mr. Pinkerton shifted uneasily.

"I'm not sure, though—she's such a passionately emotional child if she's really moved," Amelia Arnold

went on, "whether, if we could get her and Andy together, alone, away from all this dirty business, where she could see that a job of work is exactly what Quentin Sellers needs . . ."

She shook her head.

Mr. Pinkerton looked at his large silver watch. If Linda Farrell *could* see that, it would be very good. For one thing, it would save him a large sum of money. He could see it very plainly. He closed his lips firmly. It was not possible, for reasons of sentiment, and of finance, to allow this sort of nonsense to go on.

"Of course, Andy Read may not be interested, now," Miss Arnold said. "Not until all this . . . mess is cleared up."

Mr. Pinkerton put his watch away, took the last mouthful of the sweet warm gelatinous substance that remained of his strawberry cream ice, and swallowed it.

Then he looked steadily across the table.

"Well," he said, rather impressively, "it is, you know."

Miss Arnold smiled. "Is what?"

"Is cleared up," Mr. Pinkerton said. "This . . . mess."

Then Miss Arnold understood. She looked at him with widening eyes.

CHAPTER XXXVI

SEVERAL times in his life Mr. Pinkerton had explained the inwardness of a *cause célèbre* to a breathless, astounded and even—sometimes—awestruck group. But he had never in his career had so utterly fascinated an audience as now hung, leaning forward in her chair, on his words.

“*Mr. Pinkerton!*” Amelia Arnold gasped. “*Please—tell me! When . . . who?*”

Mr. Pinkerton, savouring the sweets of bewildered and spellbound attention, as he had savoured the remains of his threepenny ice, smiled across the battered nickel-plated tea service.

“There are only a couple of points to be cleared up,” he said authoritatively. “One of them is this: did you hear Quentin Sellers when he came to bed on Tuesday night, after he’d been out?”

Miss Arnold stared at him.

“Of course,” she said, in a puzzled tone.

“What time was that?”

“I don’t recall. I’d switched off my light. It couldn’t have been late, not very. But I did hear him. His door squeaks, for one thing, and he’s got the most unbearably irritating habit of kicking the legs of chairs. I’ve listened to him for years. He sets the hot-water can down on the marble slab beside his washstand and kicks it too when he reaches for his towel—the other night just as always. But I’ve told Inspector Bull all this . . . surely he doesn’t think——?”

Mr. Pinkerton shook his head, smiling.

“Anybody must have heard it, I presume?” he went on.

“Unless he was stone deaf,” Miss Arnold said tartly, with a good-humoured return to her Aquarium manner.

"And if you didn't hear him, it would be fair to assume you weren't in your room . . . if you were in the room next door, say."

Miss Arnold looked at him, bewildered.

"But I *am* in the room next door, and I *did* hear him!"

"Yes," Mr. Pinkerton said. "But, you see, *somebody else didn't!*"

Amelia Arnold stared at him silently for a moment.

"What *do* you mean?" she demanded plaintively.

"I mean," Mr. Pinkerton replied, "that we've just gone about overlooking the most obvious things, from the beginning. I'll tell you about it. But one other point first. I heard Mr. Sellers tell Linda she'd forgotten the spring in Normandy. What did he mean?"

Miss Arnold thought.

"He meant that in April, while we were all in Normandy, he played up to her. Apple blossoms and all that sort of thing. Oh, I suppose he meant it—at the time. I'd best give the devil his due."

She smiled faintly.

"But you were *all* in France?" Mr. Pinkerton persisted.

"Yes. I wanted to go to Cornwall to see friends, but I had to go too. And you know, I can't abide the French."

"Well, then," Mr. Pinkerton said, "who had the keys of the house while you were gone?"

Amelia Arnold looked at him, her face a curious kaleidoscope of bewildered emotions gradually changing into incredulous understanding.

"Oh, but that's nonsense!" she said sharply.

"I wonder," Mr. Pinkerton said. He drained the cold sugary dregs from his cup and set it down with the easy deliberation he had observed a thousand times in Inspector Bull.

"Look back over the last few days, Miss Arnold," he said. "You went up to town on Sunday. On Monday a large sum of money came into the house. How many people knew about it?"

He ticked them off on his fingers.

"Nurse Jessop, Mrs. Isom, Colonel Isom. Sellers, I should judge, through Nurse Jessop. Possibly Noakes in the same way. You didn't, of course?"

Amelia Arnold shook her head. "I thought she was changing the will. I assumed that was why she sent me up to town instead of Quentin Sellers. He usually went. I knew she was annoyed with him, and that she'd engaged a detective. When Mr. Evill turned up I supposed that was it."

"Very well," Mr. Pinkerton said. "Two of the people who knew about that money are dead. Noakes is out too. I'm afraid he's got an alibi. It's been proved quite satisfactorily. Now take one other person who was in the Pavilion about eleven o'clock and afterwards on Tuesday morning. And ask yourself these questions:

"One. Who had the keys of the house in his possession to have duplicates made to the tradesmen's entrance as well as the kitchen and front door while you were away in Normandy?

"Two. Who was perfectly aware of the situation in regard to the detective Mrs. Isom employed?

"Three. Who occupied the room next to Mr. Quentin Sellers, heard you get up and answer the telephone—in the room on the other side of Mr. Sellers even—but did not hear Mr. Sellers go into his room when he returned from his walk with Nurse Jessop?

"Four. Who had already, apparently just indiscreetly, told several people that Mrs. Isom had a large sum of money in her possession?"

Mr. Pinkerton looked across the tea-table at Amelia Arnold with some triumph, and went on.

"Five. Who was seen coming from the vegetable kitchen, in the Pavilion on Tuesday morning, just before a murder was committed with a paring knife?

"Six. Who had in his hand, all that morning, a despatch case that was not opened by the police . . . and that would have been opened, of course, if the

weapon had not craftily been left at the scene of the crime?

"Seven. Who carefully refrained from telling the police that Mrs. Isom had that large sum of money until after he had left the Pavilion . . . with his despatch case?"

"Eight. Who did not tell the police about that money, as a matter of fact, until after he had been to a stationer's shop in North Street, then to the post office in Ship Street . . . only then returning to the Chief Constable's room in Bartholomews, at which time he did tell them, with a fine show of discretion?"

Mr. Pinkerton paused once more, and summed it all up.

"Who, by the very fact of his name, is obviously the man who murdered Mrs. Isom in cold blood, and murdered Nurse Jessop because she knew he had done it? Why, of course, the man who had the simplest and most convenient way of taking the swag away from the Pavilion, and the necessary time to get rid of it."

He looked expectantly across the table. Miss Arnold looked at him for a long, bewildered, unhappy moment.

"Do you actually mean Marius Evill?" she asked quietly.

Mr. Pinkerton nodded.

Amelia Arnold sat there, staring straight ahead of her, for a long time.

"Maybe," she said then. She nodded slowly. "Then where is the money now? You say he went to the post office. . . ."

"Yes," Mr. Pinkerton said quickly. "And that's exactly the point. That's what . . ."

He had started to say, "That's what Inspector Bull thinks," but a sharp sting on the tail of his conscience stopped him. After all, Bull was a friend of long standing.

"That's what the police think. They've had people in town calling at the post office. They think, you see, that he went to the post office here and posted it. Not to his chambers in the Inn, because that would be too

easy to pick up, but Poste Restante, maybe under another name, where he could pick it up himself later, you see."

Amelia Arnold nodded. "That's a very good idea. I mean, it's a clever way to get rid of something."

Mr. Pinkerton shook his head excitedly.

"No, no, it isn't at all!" he cried. "Just think! If he had done that, then they'd find the money very quickly, and they could always identify the sender, by the writing, or the container, or the ink, or the string, or the sealing-wax, or something. It's all right if a private person is hiding something from another private person. But when you murder somebody, you cease to be private, and the police can go through every Poste Restante in the country, and find if anything was sent from Brighton, as easily as they could go through a private house. In fact a lot more easily. Don't you see?"

Miss Arnold nodded. "I do see," she said. "I'd not thought of that. They've got the money already, then."

"No," Mr. Pinkerton said. "That's the point. Because *I* think he didn't post it at all. The police think so . . . but they don't know that Marguerite Jessop knew Mr. Evill had the money."

He smiled at his fascinated audience, and picked up the moist oily crumb that remained of his cream shoe. The Welsh bard in him liked the suspense he was creating.

"*Jessop?*" Miss Arnold said.

Mr. Pinkerton nodded.

"I . . . I had a long talk with her," he went on, flushing a little at the memory. "And she said then, 'My future, my dear Mr. Pinkerton, is tucked away neatly right here in Brighton,' or something like that. I thought she meant she was not going to stay out at Sussex Square, but had some good opening in the town. But . . . well, I've not told Inspector Bull, but *I* think, of course, that she knew Evill had cached the money

somewhere hereabouts. Of course, he'd know he couldn't either leave it in the Pavilion or bring it out to the Isom house. They'd both be searched thoroughly. Of course, they're getting reports from Poste Restante everywhere. They may . . ."

Miss Arnold still looked at him, with a face in which plain incredulity struggled with a growing belief.

"That would explain why he's still there," she said abruptly. "He keeps saying he's wanted in town, but he doesn't go."

She shook her head again. Mr. Pinkerton saw that she was not yet convinced.

"And perhaps that's why he was in such a rage at Mrs. Isom's letter that Sunday . . . and why he went up to his room early on Tuesday night, even when the Colonel asked him to play chess as they've sometimes done. But . . . oh, no! Mr. Pinkerton, I can't believe it. It doesn't make sense. He'd got nothing against Mrs. Isom. He liked her, really, or he'd never have put up with her whims and crotchets."

Mr. Pinkerton nodded calmly. "That's exactly what made the whole thing so confusing from the beginning," he explained. "You see, here was a person like Mrs. Isom, whom everybody had a thousand personal reasons for getting rid of. But the simple truth was that she wasn't killed because she was a hard, bitter old harri—"

He bit the word off hastily. "—old lady, at all. She was killed for the simple reason that she had five thousand pounds in bank notes in her hands. That's a good deal of money. And then, think how clever it was for a man who could have met her anywhere to kill her in a place like the Brighton Pavilion, and at such a time!"

Miss Arnold nodded slowly. Mr. Pinkerton looked at her with a sudden distress.

"You . . . you aren't . . . I mean, you weren't . . . interested in him, were you?" he asked anxiously.

"No, no. It's just so . . . *awful*. And then, it's . . . horrible of me, but I still . . . I still believed you might find it was . . . somebody else. Just to save Linda."

Mr. Pinkerton closed his thin lips firmly again.

"We'll save Linda," he said.

He looked round for the waitress and took out his notecase from his waistcoat-pocket. He noticed something else in it besides the ten-shilling note he took out.

"I . . . I've been saving this, too, from yesterday, and . . . and from *Dover Beach*," he said, stammering a little. He took out a folded white handkerchief. A faint pleasant perfume of lavender stirred in his senses.

Amelia Arnold looked at it, and at him.

"Isn't that mine?" she said, in a puzzled tone.

Mr. Pinkerton nodded. He started to put it back into his notecase, but Miss Arnold recovered it with a sudden deft little twist.

"Mr. Evan Pinkerton!" she said severely. "I believe you're extremely silly!"

Mr. Pinkerton, blinking, turned very red, until he looked at her. She was smiling, and not as if she really thought he was silly at all. He smiled sheepishly.

"Ow many cakes did you 'ave, madam?" the waitress said.

Both Mr. Pinkerton and Miss Arnold jumped.

"I expect it was two, and the gentleman 'ad one ice—sixpence."

She added it up and put the bill down on the table.

"Ku!"

Mr. Pinkerton picked it up.

"I . . . I'll get hold of Andy Read," he said firmly, "if it's the last thing I do. And . . ."

He groped for something that would be suitable.

". . . and bring him out to Rottingdean for dinner."

Amelia Arnold smiled. "I might be able to bring Linda out," she said. "If she's not already Mrs. Quentin Sellers."

CHAPTER XXXVII

MR. PINKERTON regarded the lean hard-jawed young man on the bench beside him with uncertainty and chagrin. He blinked desperately. The situation was not good. Nothing was working out at all as he had planned. It had been fairly easy to get Andy Read out to Rottingdean. He had got him there now, in fact, on the village common, beside the pond, watching a few nondescript ducks leaving the not particularly ornamental water to waddle about the muddy edge. The white garden walls of the Kipling house were opposite them, across the pond, and they could see the little stone church with its grey lichen-stained tombstones set in the peaceful churchyard. The air was soft and warm. Except possibly for the quacking ducks it seemed to the little Welshman a very romantic spot, except also for the gloomy young man at his side. It occurred to him—now that it was too late, he thought dejectedly—that Andrew Read was not the sort of person whose affairs people went about meddling in. And altogether, instead of furthering a love match, as he had had every intention of doing, it looked very much to Mr. Pinkerton as if he had wrecked any possible chance of one.

He cleared his throat.

"Perhaps you . . . think I'm a stupid, meddling old fool," he said penitently.

"Not at all," Andy said. It was said promptly, but also rather as if that was not only what he thought but what anybody would have to think. "No, it's just that I'm not interested, that's all. If Miss Farrell wants to marry Sellers, that's her affair. The rest of us had jolly well better keep out of it."

"But she *doesn't* want to!" Mr. Pinkerton said helplessly.

"Yes?" Mr. Read asked morosely. "Who told you?"

"Oh, dear!" Mr. Pinkerton thought. "Why, anybody can *see* that," he said earnestly. "But if she doesn't, he'll not get anything from the will, and he'll have to work——"

Read grinned sardonically.

"This is the first time I ever heard of a girl marrying a fellow she doesn't like, to keep him from work," he said. "Most decent gals marry a man they like and turn slave-driver at the altar."

"This is different. You don't——"

"I guess I don't. What's more, I never will. Why, it would seem to a simple fellow like me that a good tough job wouldn't hurt a lot of men like Mr. Quentin Sellers. Piccadilly's full of 'em. Oh, hell, I'm sorry. Just a provincial national point of view. When I marry, I've got to work. In fact, if I don't get home pretty soon I'll have to hunt a new job."

He grinned suddenly at the little man beside him on the bench.

"Cheer up, Mr. Pinkerton! Don't let it get you down. These international alliances aren't so hot anyway."

Mr. Pinkerton blinked. He considered it an ill-timed jest.

"Whatever Linda's reasons for marrying Mr. Sellers," he said severely, "Quentin Sellers's reasons for marrying her are perfectly clear."

"No doubt," Mr. Read said dryly. He flicked his cigarette into the pond. It sizzled sharply and went out. A dirty white duck snapped it up instantly, and instantly rejected it.

Mr. Pinkerton summoned his courage.

"I . . . had the idea," he said slowly, "that if he were to be given a sum of money——"

The expression on Andy Read's face cut him short. He swallowed.

"Now he is going to break every bone in my body," he thought—remembering, and entirely understanding, Amelia Arnold's warning that day by the Octopus tank, in the dark mouldy recesses of the Brighton Aquarium. But nothing happened. Andy Read merely gave him one look, stuck his hands deep in his trousers pockets, thrust his long legs out in front of him, and said slowly, with a long sigh, "Well, I'll be a . . ."

His voice trailed out slowly into silence. He whistled a long, low and stupefied whistle.

"Is *that* it?" he said, with a bitter and sardonic politeness that did not deceive, or reassure, Mr. Pinkerton for an instant. "You . . . you want *me* to *pay* that . . . that . . . I mean, Mr. Quentin Sellers, so he won't have to work?"

"Oh no, no!" Mr. Pinkerton cried, aghast and shocked. "Oh, *please* don't misunderstand me. I . . . I didn't mean that at all! I didn't mean that *you* were to do it! I meant that *I* . . . *I'll* do it! Not you at all—*me!*"

Andy Read pulled his feet in, sat upright on the bench, looked down at the little man, and drew a long breath.

"Look," he said patiently. "Are you absolutely cockeyed, or is it me?"

"Well, I . . . I'm not sure," Mr. Pinkerton said. He adjusted his lozenge-shaped steel-rimmed spectacles with shaking hands. "It . . . it certainly isn't me, I'm sure."

"It certainly is you," Andy said. He continued to look down at Mr. Pinkerton with a very odd expression on his face. "Look here—what's going on, anyway, for God's sake?"

Mr. Pinkerton moistened his lips. "Nothing, really," he said. "I just thought it was a . . . a shame, a terrible shame, to see such a very nice girl marry such a . . . well, such a man. And I thought, if you cared about her—and I know you do—well, I thought perhaps I

could help. I mean, I really have quite a great deal of money, though you'd never think it to look at me, I suppose, and I never use any of it, and . . . I . . ."

He came to a halt. It was very difficult, the more so as Andy Read kept looking at him with that very odd look on his lean clean-cut irregularly good-looking young face. Then Mr. Read suddenly broke into a wide grin, which turned into a laugh and into a roar. Ducks paddled rapidly toward the opposite bank, the few people round the pond looked disapproving, or even alarmed.

"I . . . I must say I don't see anything so funny in any of this," Mr. Pinkerton managed to say.

Andy Read became abruptly serious, and looked steadily at the little man for a moment. Then he put out a large brown sinewy hand, which Mr. Pinkerton, surprised and greatly pleased, shook quite heartily.

"I'm . . . obliged to you, Mr. Pinkerton," he said quietly. "You're all wool and a yard wide."

He grinned suddenly, and his face then became serious again. "If you think she's worth all that trouble, I guess you're right."

Then Mr. Pinkerton felt the colour mounting under his narrow celluloid collar, and his heart beating rapidly. It was surely the crucial moment. Across the pond, coming into the common from the road, was Amelia Arnold; and with her, in a trim black frock with a narrow white collar and a small black hat pulled down over her golden curls, was Linda Farrell.

Andy Read sat up and stared. He got quickly to his feet and looked down at Mr. Pinkerton.

"Well," he said cheerfully, "you old Machiavelli, it's worth one more good try. It's my guess I can save you a lot of money."

He grinned again.

"With any luck, our respected friend Mr. Quentin Sellers will have to jolly well find himself a job."

Mr. Pinkerton nodded earnestly. Andy strode round

the edge of the pond toward the two women. Mr. Pinkerton's heart beat violently. Linda Farrell stopped suddenly, her hand on Miss Arnold's arm; and Mr. Pinkerton could see from the way she tossed her round little chin in the air that she was very much annoyed.

"Oh dear!" he thought. "If I could only mind my own business, and not meddle in other people's, just once!"

He watched until Andy Read came up to them and his tall frame blocked Mr. Pinkerton's view. Then he turned away. It seemed better just not to look. He did look, however, and blinked. He could hear Andy's voice.

"Oh yes you will, my girl. And make it snappy or I'll . . ."

Mr. Pinkerton could not hear the rest of it, but he saw him take Linda's arm, saw her try to pull away without the slightest success, and saw Andy Read march her across the common and disappear at the angle of the white garden walls.

He straightened his tie, took a deep breath, and rose to meet Amelia Arnold.

She was smiling very happily.

"He's really marvellous!" she cried. "I only wish he *had* flung her into the pond; it would have served her jolly well right! It would, indeed."

She sat down on the bench.

"You know," she said, "I think we might go back. I think they'll do very nicely without us."

"I . . . I'm sure they will," said Mr. Pinkerton happily.

However, they did not go back, not just then. They stopped at the Pirates' Den, overlooking the sea, and had one of the best meals that Mr. Pinkerton had eaten for a long time. If the gravy soup was as thick, the fillet of plaice as grey and flabby, the chicken as old, the bread sauce as tasteless and the tinned fruit salad as insipid as they are at most seaside restaurants, Mr. Pinkerton did not notice it. Miss Arnold did not eat a

great deal, so that she did not seem to mind. It was almost ten o'clock when they left Rottingdean, walking along in the summer night—though no one seemed to have suggested it—on the turf-cushioned chalk cliff between the Downs and the sea.

Neither of them spoke until they had left Rottingdean and passed the windmill on the Downs, with its dark arms raised in the night. Neither of them noticed the car speeding along the road, or saw it stop at the top of the hill leading down to the village by the sea. Neither of them, consequently, had any way of knowing that the large burly man with the tawny moustache was the first to spot Andrew Read and Linda Farrell in the white beam of their headlights, walking arm-in-arm up the road, dazed and starry-eyed, and in entire agreement as to the disagreeable future of Mr. Quentin Sellers.

The car drew up at the kerb by them.

"I say, Mr. Read!" Bull called. "Where's Pinkerton?"

Andy Read looked round for a very brief instant, grinned happily, and waved his hand. "Gone back to the town, I guess," he said.

Inspector Bull glanced at Linda Farrell, and smiled. "Thanks," he said placidly. "Good luck to you both."

He nodded to the driver.

The car spun round in the road and turned back, but neither Andy Read nor Linda Farrell was interested in that.

Mr. Pinkerton and Amelia Arnold walked slowly along, on the cliff, looking out at the sea, Miss Arnold's hand resting lightly on his arm. They were talking about Marius Evill, and neither of them saw or heard the crawling figure, still some distance off, creeping after them, on the ground, pressing down into the thick turf as if the night were not dark enough to conceal him, and yet moving steadily, even rapidly, toward them with a desperate silent speed.

They went on, toward the bench where they had sat on Tuesday evening.

"Your friend Bull won't catch Mr. Evill out, I'm afraid," Amelia Arnold said quietly. "He's much too shrewd."

Mr. Pinkerton started to speak, and stopped as he felt a sudden shiver run along her arm resting in his.

"I . . . I wish you'd never got mixed up in all this, really," she said.

A curious pleasant thrill ran down the little grey man's spine. The sea rolled darkly beneath them, standing there on the edge of the lonely cliff. He could see the white chalk wall stretching, dimly perpendicular, into the night. The lights of a solitary boat gleamed, off toward France. Her hand trembled again on his arm. Another line of the poem they had said together, not far from this spot, came into his head. It was at that moment that Amelia Arnold, playing her last desperate card, tried to push Mr. Pinkerton off the cliff.

One thing only saved him. When Amelia Arnold jerked his arm suddenly forward and to one side, to throw him off balance, and lunged into him savagely with all her weight and strength, her right foot, away from the cliff, slipped on the tough grass. If her shoulder had struck him squarely in the side as she had planned, Mr. Pinkerton would have gone hurtling down the side of the white cliff in the fraction of a second, and would have smashed on the concrete walk below with only the vaguest knowledge of what had happened; and Miss Amelia Arnold could have hurried on to the house in Sussex Square to think up her third alibi. As it was, Mr. Pinkerton, struck obliquely as she lost purchase and lurched, was spun round and toppled off his feet into the safest position he could have found. Miss Arnold, carried off her feet also by her impetus and her failure to make square contact, was on him again in an instant, cool, silent and desperate, tearing at his hands, straining to lift him along the slippery grass. But in

that instant Mr. Pinkerton, terrified beyond words as he was, had automatically and dimly realized what it must mean, and had already scrambled a precious two feet from the cliff's edge and instinctively dug his hands, his feet, his shoulders and his chin into the turf.

Mr. Pinkerton was small, frail, well past middle age and had never been strong or active. Miss Arnold was heavier, younger, and had a woman's wiry and nervous strength. Even then, it would probably not have been possible for her to succeed if it had not been for the utter bewilderment, the desperate surprise, above all the shock of incredible, hideous horror as her design dawned in the little man's mind. When he felt the force of her first lunge and saw dimly her white contorted face, and realized in an unthinking way that Amelia Arnold was actually trying to murder him, it was not so much the idea of what she was doing, as why she was doing it, that made him frozen and paralysed and almost helpless. The dreadful knowledge flashed into his brain like a searing streak of lightning. The woman was killing him there, if she could, just as she had done Nurse Jessop, in almost the same spot and for the same reason. It was not that she hated him. It was that—like Nurse Jessop—he *knew*.

Even then, writhing there on the turf at the very brink of the great cliff, digging his toes into the soft earth, gripping with frantic strength at the grass his fingers had automatically clutched, fighting with all his feeble nerve to keep from being hurled down on to the sea wall seventy-five feet below, Mr. Pinkerton could feel the idea beating at his brain, with a sort of incredible incongruity, that he really had known, in a way. Up to a point he had been absolutely right. Everything he had said—every important thing he had said—had been true . . . with one exception: he had simply got the wrong person.

It did, however, appear to be a vitally important exception. He could distinctly remember having thought

that, later; and also, through precisely the small series of fleeting instants that the affair occupied, that it was all very odd. He had never before been put in such imminent danger of his life, and he knew perfectly well that he was neither a cool nor a courageous man. In his most romantic day-dreams he had never fancied that he was, or could be. But here in such a situation—and though it lasted only a few seconds of actual time—he felt himself in the most distinct and detached way living in a strange double existence. One part of him, cruelly and brutally physical on the edge of the cliff, almost paralysed with horrible terror, was holding grimly on with feet and hands as she strained frantically, with incredible strength and ferocity, to break his precarious grip. The other part was standing back somewhere, very safely away from cliffs and sea wall below and imminent destruction, thinking in the calmest and most penetrating way about what all this implied, remembering point after point that should have told him from the beginning that Amelia Arnold had killed Mrs. Isom and Nurse Jessop; recalling, even with a feeling of shame for his stupidity, all that he had told her, in the tea-shop that day, that had made it plain to her that she had got to get him out of the way. He even had a sudden incongruous memory of her telling him, as the Octopus woman in the Aquarium, that Andy Read would break every bone in his body. Andy Read indeed, the other Mr. Pinkerton thought with some amusement. It was metaphorical then, no doubt. It was literal now. He could even remember, later, having wondered, at the very instant that he momentarily lost his hold on the grass and could feel the chalk crumbling beneath his feet on the cliff's edge, whether Inspector Bull would ever be able to figure out where the five thousand pounds had got to.

It happened in an immense instant, a colossal fraction of passing time, a tiny eternity that was hardly longer than the flash of the light out in the Channel.

Mr. Pinkerton clenched his teeth grimly, his heart bursting, the sweat pouring from him, his throat aching, his fingers hurting terribly as he ground them into the tough dry grass and strained them agonizingly to hold on. He had just realized, with a numbed feeling that it made no difference really, that it was no use—the woman, her strength summoned and prepared, and intensified by the frenzy of utter necessity, was stronger and tougher than he; his hands, unused to this kind of work, could not hold on, were slowly loosing their grip—when he heard the shout along the cliff.

It was not a shout exactly. It was more like the savage trumpeting of a herd of desperate and infuriated elephants. And then Mr. Pinkerton, one ear ground bloodily into the earth, could hear heavy footsteps pounding along the cliff top, coming nearer and nearer with incredible speed, and remembered vaguely, with a kind of feeble and dying admiration, that he had often wondered how Inspector Bull could when necessary move so huge a bulk so fast. It was just then that Amelia Arnold made a last effort that moved Mr. Pinkerton, rapidly weakening, to the very edge, looked round as Inspector Bull roared again in his gigantic charge along the cliff, rose suddenly to her feet, stood there, poised, marble-stiff, for a terrible instant, and took two swift steps toward the sea and disappeared.

Mr. Pinkerton, sobbing with fright and exhaustion, his heart pumping furiously and his brain whirling, struggled to his feet, reeled drunkenly, lost his balance, and fell headlong on the edge. He could feel the grass and chalk crumbling with him, see the white ribbon of concrete below as he slid slowly down toward it, hear the sullen crash that came up from there; and then, as the last thing he was to do in this world, he had a complete awful flashing vision of Marie Louise Isom sitting in her bath-chair in the fantastic Music Room of the Pavilion and Amelia Arnold standing there in front

of her; and he could hear himself thinking, "I . . . I actually *saw* her murdered!"

He clutched at nothing with numbed fingers, and decided feebly to let it go, as the world reeled about him, black and nauseating; the "edges drear and naked shingles of the world," he thought, as the coarse soil grated against his face. Inspector Bull, flinging himself dangerously on the turf at full length, managed to get just one great hand on a scrawny ankle. It was enough. Mr. Pinkerton came up the cliff nearly as fast as he was very near to going down it. He could vaguely, as at a great distance, hear Inspector Bull cursing shockingly; then he could vividly feel himself being violently sick.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

MR. PINKERTON stared at himself in the rippled mirror over his washbasin in the Green Trout the next morning, and lathered his grey stubbly chin most ruefully.

So far as he could remember, only once before, in all his lengthy association with Inspector Bull in the magnificent but certainly tricky business of tracking down the evil-doer, had he been so utterly, unbelievably and incompetently wrong. It did not console him, drawing his old-fashioned, stained-ivory-handled razor down his left cheek, rather clumsily because of his bandaged fingers and painfully because of his scratched face, that he had been so dangerously right as almost to have been at that very moment a mangled corpse, mouldering on the sea wall beyond Black Rock, with hundreds of sea-gulls screaming his requiem. It was too barren a life to chew comfortably, especially when through the closed door of the next room he could hear the ponderous stirrings and portentous final snores that were the morning prelude to the awakening of Inspector Bull of New Scotland Yard. He had heard them a thousand times as he had crept up the stairs in Golders Green, in other days, with his wife's lodger's polished regulation boots in one hand and his morning cup of tea in the other, to rap timidly at his door.

He finished shaving and went to the open window. It was a gorgeous day, for a change, but the crisp tonic air of the sea and the dazzling rays of the sun did not interest him. In the next room he could hear Inspector Bull's thunderous awakening, and in a moment the door opened. Bull's richly tawny hair was still tangled with sleep. He had on a purple-and-grey

striped flannel dressing-gown of gigantic proportions, and he yawned immensely. Or started to, and stopped half way when he caught sight of the grey stricken little man standing meek and miserable by the window.

Bull was often ponderous and deliberate, but his intuitions had the speed of light, and he was a kindly man.

He came on into the room. "I expect it was the Poste Restante that misled you," he said in a matter-of-fact voice.

Mr. Pinkerton shook his head. He was glad, however, for one thing that a less tactful man might not have done; glad Bull was not trying to pretend it was his belief that Mr. Pinkerton had known it all the time, and had got Miss Amelia Arnold over the cliff purposely, just to save the Crown the expense of a big show at the Sussex Assizes.

"No," he said. "It wasn't so much that as my plain . . . *crashing* stupidity."

"Nonsense, Pinkerton," Bull said. "Are you all right?"

Mr. Pinkerton nodded. He was privately sure he would not ever be the same man again, but he had not been able to find any particular thing that was seriously damaged.

"As a matter of fact," Bull went on soberly, "I expect I owe you an apology."

Mr. Pinkerton blinked again.

"Not for not telling you what was going on," Bull continued, with some haste. "I was afraid you'd got yourself too . . . too tied up with some of these people to be a good policeman, on this occasion."

Mr. Pinkerton nodded contritely, and also with some small degree of pleasure at the way Bull had put it. It was the one small rift, so far, in the universal gloom.

"What I mean is, I'd got to use you, because you'd got the entrée, so to speak—like sending a ferret down the rabbit-hole to bring 'em out, in a way."

It was perhaps not the most tactful way of putting it, but Mr. Pinkerton understood.

"And not telling me anything was like the muzzle you'd put on the ferret, I expect," he said. He even managed a faint smile.

Bull nodded soberly. He came in and sat down on Mr. Pinkerton's bed.

"I had no idea she'd act so quickly about you," he said, shaking his head. "And I couldn't do anything about *her*. I was waiting, putting out false leads, to see if she wouldn't do something."

Mr. Pinkerton could not do it outwardly, of course, but mentally he shook his head. It seemed to him that Miss Arnold had come very near to doing something drastic. However, he knew what Inspector Bull meant.

"I hadn't enough to go before a jury with. It was too carefully worked out. And when she'd had to change all of it on the spur of the moment, she did it beautifully. She made one little blunder, and she made one mistake subsequently, which was just plain bad luck. Otherwise, except for a good many odd things that might mean something or might not, there was nothing I could say. I couldn't say she opened the letter to Evill on the train on Sunday morning. It looked as if she was the only one who didn't know the old lady had the money—the only one Evill hadn't told, at any rate. I couldn't say, either, that she was the one who left the kitchen door at the Pavilion unlatched, so she could get in that way—which she did. I couldn't say she didn't slip in at the front entrance with the group of women.

"She was a . . . a very intelligent person. She had a beautiful alibi prepared, and when you caught her red-handed, so to speak, she'd got to change it all about . . . and she did it. Many a person would have gone to pieces just then. She did, after she'd got rid of you, for some minutes. Incidentally, that's what put Jessop on to her, when she started thinking about it."

Mr. Pinkerton nodded dejectedly. He had figured that out himself.

"When she pulled herself together, she had to fix up something, of course, that would fit in with her previous arrangements. That was terribly difficult, naturally; and while she did it with great intelligence, still there were little points that made me wonder from the very first. I asked you two or three of 'em. Why was the kitchen door unlocked when Isom went out? Why was the knife left in Mrs. Isom's throat? I thought from the beginning those were terribly important questions; and finally I realized what the answers were. The door was unlocked and left so by somebody who had been in there once and wanted to go out and come back—not by the front entrance. There was no other reason for it. And that fits Arnold only, of all the people there. And, of course, as you've realized, the answer to the second question is that it wasn't.

"But there were several other little points that seemed to me interesting. For example: wasn't Miss Arnold's story about slipping past the attendant at the front entrance very odd? Again: if she thought Mrs. Isom had had a stroke, wouldn't she have gone to her herself? And if, under the circumstances, she'd met Andy Read coming up those stairs when she came down, wouldn't she have been certain to speak to him? And why should she start screaming after you'd gone? So I thought from the first that all the indications, slight as they were, pointed to her as the person who had killed the old lady. Then there was another interesting thing: why did Miss Arnold leave her umbrella in the Gallery? That might have meant anything or nothing. I thought about that, and finally I worked out the answer. I'll tell you about it in a moment. And then, when Jessop was killed, she made one statement that was a complete giveaway.

"So I expect this is how it was," Inspector Bull went on deliberately. "She was at the end of her rope with

Mrs. Isom. Her good friends Jessop and Sellers were working against her steadily, showing she was the go-between in the Farrell-Read affair and no doubt for Colonel Isom too. I've no doubt she opened Mrs. Isom's letter to Evill on the train."

"She said," Mr. Pinkerton offered, with a feeble spark kindling in his demolished little ego, "that she thought the letter had to do with Mrs. Isom's will."

Bull nodded. "She may very likely have done. She opened it to see if it was changed to leave her out. So that barring Mrs. Isom herself, she was actually the first to know Evill was bringing five thousand pounds down with him. She knew it before Evill did. Then she began laying her plans."

"Would she . . . really have thought I was a detective following Linda and Andy?"

Bull deliberated, chewing one end of his moustache, as if it were a point of the greatest moment.

"She probably did," he said. "And wanted to make sure you weren't going to do the same thing the next day. Only, you did, of course."

Mr. Pinkerton gazed out of the window.

"Which was probably the biggest stroke of luck," Bull said impressively, "that anybody in the detective business has had for a long time."

Mr. Pinkerton brightened, and flushed a little in spite of himself.

"In fact, we'd never have got to the root of it, probably," Bull went on, "if it hadn't been for you. She had a practically perfect alibi . . . and you wrecked it."

Mr. Pinkerton came back from the window and sat down near Bull.

"Really, Inspector?" he asked, a little breathlessly.

"There's no doubt of it," Bull answered seriously. "This is what happened. Amelia Arnold's really very clever story to us was like this. She deposited Linda Farrell in the Pavilion, knowing Andy Read would be

there, and then left her. She went out of the Pavilion, by the main entrance, went round and bought some pastry at a shop in Castle Square. So far it was true. She spoke to the Pavilion attendant when she went out—that was another little point that could mean anything or nothing—and she asked the time of the assistant in the pastry shop. She told him she'd got to buy some tomatoes in Kensington Street before lunch, and she hurried out. Her story went on that when she'd got out of that shop into the street she saw Quentin Sellers and was alarmed for Linda. She says she went back, therefore, slipped in with a group of women in the entrance hall—she was in a great hurry so she didn't go in regularly—and went into the Gallery. You know all the rest of her story. She went to the Music Room, saw Mrs. Isom apparently ill there and went out to look for Jessop. Couldn't find her in the Gallery, or upstairs, or in the Gallery again, went back and found Mrs. Isom killed. That was her story, after she'd been caught . . . by you, Pinkerton."

Mr. Pinkerton began to breathe a little more comfortably. He was coming out of this rather better than he had expected.

"What really happened was this," Inspector Bull went on methodically. "She did leave Linda Farrell there, as she said. She unlatched that kitchen door and went out, taking care to speak to the attendant. You should never do that, by the way, Pinkerton. It's enough just to make sure you catch his eye. He's sure to remember you, and if you speak under such circumstances it's overdoing it a bit. Well, she went to the pastry shop, established an alibi there, slipped round Castle Square into Palace Place, came in by that kitchen door you saw Colonel Isom go out by, went upstairs at the south end of the Pavilion, and across the upper floor to the north. She knew, I needn't say—in fact no doubt she purposely let Jessop overhear her arrangements about Linda and Andy—that Mrs. Isom would be there, that

Jessop having got her there would be off out of sight somewhere, trusting to the young people to wander in so that Mrs. Isom could see them—as I've no doubt they did do.

“Now, she had twenty times less chance of being seen up there than on the ground floor. But just in case, she'd no doubt fixed up a yarn about being sent by Mrs. Isom to find Jessop. And Evill did see her—not, of course, hunting for anybody. She had just come up, from the kitchens, up the south stairs, and was heading rapidly toward the Music Room, having *already established part of an alibi outside*. She then went down the north stairs, which took her down into the Gallery just to the door of the Music Room, say forty feet from where Mrs. Isom was sitting in the bath-chair.

“As she was coming down, it's no doubt true that, as she says, she did pass Andy Read, who was going up the double stairs at just that moment. She'd have denied that, of course, but for two things: one, she assured herself he didn't see her, and two, he gave his evidence, which, of course, is what diverted suspicion from her, that Mrs. Isom was dead when he saw her *before* he went up the stairs. He really didn't see her. That must have been a terrible moment for her.

“And that's when you saw her, Pinkerton, when you came out into the Gallery. She was standing there, with her umbrella in her hand, staring up after Read, to see if he'd seen her. It would have made a terrific difference in everything. You closed the door quickly, down at the other end of the Gallery, and went back into the South Drawing-room. Miss Arnold then did three things. She probably went up the stairs quickly after Read, to make sure—though he would have spoken to her, of course, if he'd seen her; she looked quickly through the door of the North Drawing-room, next to the Music Room, to see nobody was there; and she went into the Music Room and killed Mrs. Isom, with a paring knife she could have got anywhere.

"And she was standing there, aghast at her crime, with the knife still in her hand, when you popped your head in at the door."

Inspector Bull smiled faintly at the expression on Mr. Pinkerton's face.

"It was perfectly natural that you shouldn't have dreamed it was really she who had done it," he said soberly. "Well, it was a terrible moment. And, of course, as you've seen, it was a . . . a peculiarly horrible moment for her, because she'd no doubt realized as soon as she'd done it that the old woman was unconscious, after a stroke. If all she wanted was the money—which may have been the case—she'd killed her unnecessarily; all she had to do was take it. So, if that was the case, she must have looked—and felt—very horrible indeed.

"Now, she'd planned to do the act and get back up those stairs at the north end of the Gallery, with the money of course, go back the way she'd come, across in the upper apartments, down the south stairs, out of the kitchen door, and be on her way home after getting the tomatoes while everybody was barging about in the Pavilion. Who could have proved she was there at all except before she had left to go to the pastry shop? Barring an accident, she had a very good alibi. The whole business would have taken her five minutes, if that, and she could always have maintained, if it was questioned, even, that she'd just gone on from the pastry shop to where she'd got the tomatoes, and then on home.

"However, she ran into dreadful luck. It so happened that the Pavilion was jammed, so to speak, with all sorts of people who had no right to be there from her point of view. She knew Colonel Isom would be in the library as he always was; but he'd seen Sellers and had come along to see if he was having a clandestine meeting with Jessop, whom Isom, of course, had lost his head over. She may have known Evill was going to

the doctor's, as he did; she certainly could have had no idea in the world he would come to the Pavilion. She probably had no reason to think Sellers would complicate things by being there, and could certainly expect Jessop to be lying low somewhere. As a matter of fact, she was.

"However, the worst blow, of course, was you, Pinkerton. She'd no doubt, just before she killed the old woman, looked in through the door of the North Drawing-room and seen it was empty; and it was only going to take her a minute, or less, to be through and out. But you, for reasons of your own, were hurrying; and you came through the North Drawing-room in a few seconds. And there you were, by the purest chance, almost at the very moment that she killed the old lady."

Mr. Pinkerton sat down on the edge of his bed too, and adjusted his spectacles. If he had only known, he thought. He wondered. What would he conceivably have done if he had known?

"So, she rallied there, almost instantly, and must have done it very well to have fooled you. She turned on you and sent you off at top speed. That gave her a minute or two. She took the leather envelope with the five thousand in it, concealed it—she was wearing her raincoat all this time, remember, and she probably put it up under her skirt . . . pinned it there, perhaps, to make sure—and changed her story to fit the new emergency.

"Here she made a slight mistake. Her new story, of course, had to contain part of her old one, for she'd taken pains to be seen by the attendant going out, and in the pastry shop. Now, when the attendant came into the Music Room after you'd told him you were calling the police, Miss Arnold was at the far end of the room. She said she'd been to the Gallery to see if anybody was out there. That was plausible enough. But, when they searched the Pavilion later, that afternoon when the

part about the money came out, they found nothing, you remember—except Miss Arnold's umbrella out in the Gallery. It seemed to me odd that it should have been out there.

"It's my guess that when she first started on her second alibi, she determined to say she'd come back because she'd forgotten her umbrella and left it in the Pavilion. That's always a good kind of an excuse because it's the kind of a thing you do forget. So, immediately you'd gone, she slipped out and left it in the Gallery—she'd had it with her, you remember, when you saw her at the foot of the stairs. She came back to the Music Room, and there she was. Then, of course, being an intelligent woman, she began thinking it over, and saw, of course, that it was a bad story. She'd had the umbrella with her, and either the attendant or the assistant at the pastry shop might remember that she had. So then she made up the story of Quentin Sellers. That was much better; but the umbrella was out in the Gallery and she had no way of getting it. She might possibly have picked it up on her way out, except that I was thinking about something and had followed her instead of staying and listening to Nurse Jessop's story, and she couldn't do it.

"Now Miss Jessop. A thing that caught my eye early was that Jessop, who'd been outside on the terrace, I imagine trying to signal Noakes to keep an eye on Arnold when she left, kept saying she really ought to go with Arnold, she really wasn't in any state to be alone and so on. Evill, of course, not knowing Mrs. Isom had brought the money with her, said nothing about it. If we had known, then everybody would have been searched. As it was, with the weapon there, there was no point in it, no apparent necessity of anybody's concealing anything. I assumed Jessop was trying to get away herself. When she was killed, that again pointed back to Miss Arnold."

Mr. Pinkerton tried to extract a certain cold comfort

from the fact that somebody besides himself had made a mistake. But the idea was not very exhilarating.

"Jessop knew, or guessed, directly, just there in the Pavilion, that Arnold had done it, or at any rate had got the money, which was all Jessop cared about. How she did it, one guess is as good as another. I wondered later why she didn't tell us about the black leather envelope. She'd known all about it, and she was the only one you can prove did so. I couldn't make out that Noakes knew the envelope had money in it, or that Evill, Sellers or Isom knew she'd had the envelope with her. Jessop knew both. She didn't tell us, of course, because she expected to get it for herself before she was done. My guess is that, knowing the envelope was gone, she either saw or felt it on Arnold's person."

Mr. Pinkerton nodded. It was certainly possible.

"So Nurse Jessop becomes an important person, then. She'd let Arnold know she knew, in some way. I don't expect there was any overt act there, more likely two women who understood each other thoroughly. There was an appointment to talk it over. Sellers was telling the truth when he admitted, later, he'd seen Jessop that night and she'd sent him off. As Noakes said, she wasn't interested in him. She was interested in money. It was Noakes on the balcony that night too. Miss Arnold had already slipped out. She was not in her room. She'd gone out at the back. She met Jessop on the cliff. Jessop, not being a fool, must have suspected danger. But she was younger, stronger and cool; she expected, I've no doubt, she could look out for herself. And she was pitched off by a sharp sudden attack . . . just as you came within an inch of being. Her clutching the cord and eyeglass would be pure accident. Arnold had it with her to plant on her body, I imagine.

"And, of course, she'd made two mistakes there. She tore the eyeglass out of Isom's waistcoat—the yellow one, not the dark one he was wearing that

evening. And later, telling me about Sellers, she said she'd heard him come in, because he kicked his hot-water can. But I already knew that Noakes, upset by the fear that his wife had killed the old lady, hadn't brought any hot water. Well, all that looked bad . . . and when Noakes told us he'd heard Linda Farrell slip in, the back way, quite early that night, before we'd got there, that was all anyone needed. We knew it wasn't Linda Farrell. We had Noakes's unconscious evidence that it was (a) a woman, and (b) a person whose step was familiar to him. That could only have been Amelia Arnold. If he'd heard Marius Evill out there he'd have gone out and investigated."

Mr. Pinkerton drew a deep, disconsolate breath. "I . . . I never thought of that," he said.

"You were too much occupied with that boy and girl downstairs," Bull said kindly. "Which isn't odd, considering that he did his best to ruin the whole show. He had no idea Mrs. Isom was dead. He'd seen Linda Farrell running round the north end of the Pavilion. She'd seen Jessop and Quentin Sellers in the Gallery. They'd both, of course, popped their heads into the Music Room the very first thing, or she had, from your account of what she was saying when you first heard them, and seen the old lady. No wonder she wanted to get out of there. I dare say she knew Sellers and the nurse were hatching up a plot against her, and against her only friend."

"Who do you mean?" inquired Mr. Pinkerton.

Bull shook his head a little.

"Black's got to be black and white white for you, Pinkerton," he said. "Amelia Arnold wasn't all bad. She was much better, no doubt, than we've any idea. She was a dependent, overworked, paid nothing, bullied, humiliated and mortified on every hand. She . . . she simply got caught up in a net, and she fought to get out of it. She took one step, and she had to take two others to save her life. She was genuinely fond of

that girl. I expect Miss Linda Farrell is the person who'll miss her."

He gave Mr. Pinkerton a troubled sideways glance. Mr. Pinkerton saw it. He blushed a little.

"Why, I . . . I thought she was a very nice lady, I . . . I must say," he stammered. "I . . . she seemed very attractive, to me. I mean, I wasn't . . ."

Bull's heavy face cleared. He nodded.

"I . . . I don't see exactly why she'd got to kill me," Mr. Pinkerton said. He flushed a little again, saying it; for he had rather more of a notion about it than he had any idea of telling Inspector Bull.

"That was the thing she had got to do the most of all," Bull said, so promptly that Mr. Pinkerton blinked rapidly.

"You see, if we'd brought her to trial—and she'd succeeded in her attempt on you—we couldn't ever introduce the evidence that you'd seen her with the knife in her hand, actually killing the old lady. Because you'd be dead. And the only evidence of a dead man that can be used is actual dying evidence. We'd have had tough going without you. That's why it was absolutely necessary for her to get you out of the way. I can't think of any other reason . . . but that was reason enough."

Mr. Pinkerton hesitated. It was a great temptation to say nothing at all. But he conquered it.

"Well, I'm afraid I rather outlined my case against Mr. Evill in too much detail," he said apologetically. "I . . . for one thing, I said I was sure you were wrong in thinking the money had been sent through the post."

He said nothing about the handkerchief, although it had some time ago occurred to him why Amelia Arnold had taken it away from him, and realized fully that it was one of the chief reasons for her attempt to kill him. He had known perfectly well all the time, if he had only stopped to think about it, that it had not been under the bench there when the two of them had

left together. He would have seen it. If he had only used his head, even apart from that, he could have told that it had not been there long when he had found it. The scent of lavender would not have been very strong after several hours in the open sea air. Amelia Arnold had dropped it there, late that night, when she was supposed to be in her room in the house in Sussex Square. But there was no use mentioning all that to Inspector Bull.

Bull moved back toward his own room.

"Well, she's dead," he said stolidly. "Nobody's going to lead us to the money. It'll turn up sometime."

He went on through the door. Mr. Pinkerton, sitting there on the edge of his bed, could hear him puffing and blowing as he washed at the stand in the corner.

Mr. Pinkerton sat there perfectly still for some minutes. Then he picked up his brown bowler and crept, cautiously and very quietly, out of his door.

CHAPTER XXXIX

INSPECTOR BULL glanced about the little circle of men gathered in the Chief Constable's room in the Town Hall, picked up his papers and put them back in his pocket. "So that's the way it was," he said. For a moment no one spoke, thinking over his account, which was somewhat more detailed than he had given Mr. Pinkerton in the room at the Green Trout.

Except for Andy Read, the only person in the high-ceilinged room not connected with the police was Colonel Horatio Isom. He seemed little interested in the details, Inspector Bull thought. But, of course, it was impossible to tell. His cavernous eyes moved restlessly from face to face. The fact that two successful and one unsuccessful attempts at violent crime had rid him at once of a wife, a friend, and an old companion in the difficult and constant task of coping with his wife seemed a matter of slight concern to him. After all, Bull reflected, it was best to take it that way if you could.

It was clear, however, from Colonel Isom's few disjointed contributions to the conference, that there were two points that disturbed him considerably. There appeared to be nothing to drink on hand, for one thing. In the second place, while Inspector Bull's case was quite settled, there appeared to be no five thousand pounds. It was plain that Colonel Isom blamed the police for both. He sat there muttering under his breath from time to time. Inspector Bull was glad that he could catch only an occasional phrase: "... spent life in the saddle . . . first time had to put up with . . . atrocious nincompoops."

Andy Read stood by the window, looking out of it

impatiently between second-long intervals of looking at his watch. A girl was waiting in Sussex Square, and in his pocket was a special licence, got for him by none other than Mr. Farquarson the Chief Constable.

"The money will turn up, sir," Bull said. "They'll keep after it here. We'll keep after it in Town. I'd hoped, of course, that nothing would force our hand till she'd got it back. But there we were."

Colonel Isom then offered one plain constructive criticism. "All comes of that mouldy little ass of a Welshman," he mumbled irately.

It was unfortunate that the door from the Chief Constable's anteroom opened at just that instant, and the mouldy little ass himself put his head apologetically in and followed it timidly. It was more than a little awkward. Mr. Pinkerton managed, somehow, to get the door closed behind him, and stood there blinking at them, quite at a loss, for a moment, to explain his extraordinary appearance. It was no help that everybody—Inspector Johnson, Inspector Voorhees, the Chief Constable, Bull, Andy Read, and even Colonel Isom himself—was staring at him as if he had gone utterly imbecile.

In his arms Mr. Pinkerton had a large, richly pink, dust-covered crockery tub. It was darkened and crinkled with age, with hundreds of tiny lines running over the glossy surface. It had a medallion in gold in the centre of the pink field, a crockery tap, an ancient cork stopper, and a flat crockery top with an acorn knob. Mr. Pinkerton, gazing in a sort of triumphant trepidation from one to another of them, and quite speechless for the moment, noticed that Colonel Isom's eyes brightened for an instant in spite of himself; for on the medallion, in chaste gold lettering, was neatly inscribed the solitary word "Gin."

The Chief Constable drew a long deep breath, and looked at Inspector Bull with a glance in which wrath, bewilderment and anxiety were plainly combined.

Bull's large placid red face turned a shade redder, or so Mr. Pinkerton feared. He moistened his lips and spoke hastily.

"I . . . I hope I didn't interrupt an important conference," he stammered, and could have giggled at having said such a silly thing. "You see, I . . . I bought this for Mr. Read. Mr. Honeycutt says Americans drink a great deal of gin, and I couldn't go wrong on this. They . . . it's the sort of thing they buy themselves, and I'd noticed, in his room, that Mr. Read hadn't got one yet."

The silence in the room grew most ominous. Andy Read grinned, scratched his head, started to speak and did not. Mr. Pinkerton noticed the quick significant glance exchanged by Inspectors Voorhees and Johnson. The lean wrinkled face of Mr. Farquarson the Chief Constable turned slowly to a dark red. Then he shook his head, in a gentle and almost pitying way, and turned quickly to Inspector Bull.

Bull shook his head too. "Who is Mr. Honeycutt, Pinkerton?" he asked slowly.

"Why, he's an antique dealer, in the Lanes," Mr. Pinkerton said easily. "Just . . . just near the Pavilion, you know. It's a . . . a very crowded little shop—all sorts of things there that aren't touched year in and year out. It's quite near the Pavilion, you see. The bell on the door rings when you go in, but not till it's open about ten inches, and even when it does ring, why, Mr. Honeycutt's always upstairs, and it takes him ever so long to get down. I mean, each time I was in there it really did take him three or four minutes."

He walked soberly across the room and deposited the dirty old-fashioned pink tub on the Chief Constable's desk in front of Inspector Bull.

Bull watched him silently.

"Miss Arnold was a good customer of his," Mr. Pinkerton added. It really seemed that he was having to make it very obvious.

Then Inspector Bull smiled a little, and his mild blue eyes lighted with great relief. He picked up the top by the acorn handle. He glanced at Mr. Pinkerton. Then, for one of the very few times in Mr. Pinkerton's life, he chuckled.

His hand was much too large to go into the round opening in the top of the tub, but he thrust two fingers in. They came out with a small roll of thin white paper, heavily engraved with black inky flourishes.

Inspector Bull chuckled again, and laid the little sheaf of Bank of England notes on the Chief Constable's desk. He looked at Mr. Pinkerton again, his great massive body shaking with inward mirth; and then, to Mr. Pinkerton's surprise and for the second time in his life so far as Mr. Pinkerton knew, he burst into a roar of stentorian laughter, in which the two Inspectors, the Chief Constable and indeed every one else in the room eventually joined, according to their capacities. The windows and chandelier shook, an alarmed constable in the anteroom thrust a head in at the door, and Mr. Pinkerton blinked and reddened, his head swimming with modest triumph.

Inspector Bull stopped suddenly and wiped his eyes.

"How did you get on to it, Pinkerton?" he asked very soberly.

"Why, it really wasn't anything," Mr. Pinkerton explained. "You see, I was an eyewitness of the murder of . . . of the first murder, though of course I really didn't know it, and so I was too when she tried to recover the money. I . . . I really seem always to be interrupting somebody. Nurse Jessop gave me the clue that she'd concealed the money somewhere before she got back to Sussex Square, and I thought she'd probably be right about it. Anyway, Miss Arnold was much too bright a woman to have posted it. And then I realized, when I saw her going in there yesterday

evening, how close it was to the Pavilion, and how simple it would be just to pop in there, when you'd finished questioning her, opening that door just wide enough to get through, so it wouldn't ring, and slip the money into some dusty old thing that she knew had been there for years. It would be a risk, of course, but the chances were all that it wouldn't be touched, not for the time she had to leave it there.

"So I just went back, when I thought of it, and did the same thing, in a way. I . . . I got in without the bell ringing, and I knew if it was there it would be just near the door and under something. This was behind a whole pile of things. And Mr. Honeycutt never did come down, not till I'd gone back and rung the bell twice."

Inspector Bull nodded approvingly, and spoke the most enthusiastic and elaborate words of praise that Mr. Pinkerton had ever heard him use. "Very good, Pinkerton," he said.

In the buzz and babble of congratulation and applause Mr. Pinkerton suddenly remembered that he had still two things to say, and collected himself. He turned to Colonel Isom.

"There . . . I fancy there should be a reward, for recovering that much money?" he asked.

"Oh, rather," Colonel Isom said instantly. "Rather indeed—ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Farquarson the Chief Constable nodded too. "As a matter of fact, Mr. Pinkerton, a reward of two hundred pounds has just been posted by Mr. Marius Evill."

Mr. Pinkerton blinked. It was rather more than he had expected, even.

"Then . . . do you think I could have it . . . now?" he asked. "You see, I . . . I mean I'd like Mr. Read to take it out to Miss Farrell when he goes . . . as a present from all of us."

The other thing he had to say was in private with

Andrew Read, and he said it when they were shaking hands just as Andy departed.

“Tell Mr. Quentin Sellers that there’s a very good opening for him advertised in the registry window in West Street.”

“What doing?” said Mr. Read.

“And he hasn’t got to have any particular training. Why, they need a traveller in portable water softeners. . . .”

Andy Read grinned.

“O.K.,” he said. “O.K. for Mr. Sellers, that is. —But what does it make the farmer’s daughter?”

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